

Chapter 1

The Dragon Facility

“Come on, just around here Harry.” Charlie easily slipped into an alley behind Kings Cross.

Harry did his best to remain inconspicuous as he too entered the alley. Charlie fumbled as he pulled something out of his pocket. Harry found this odd because he personally knew that the tanned man was very good at Quidditch. When his eyes caught the item that his temporary guardian was holding his confusion evaporated.

“Bloody, Tyler.” Charlie mumbled gripping the animated chocolate frog. “Figures he’s use this for a portkey.”

Harry bit back his smile. “Won’t the dragons be afraid of two suddenly appearing wizards? I’ve read that they have incredible snouts.”

Charlie grinned and held out the frog. “We aren’t going straight into the facility.”

Harry grabbed his trunk and took a hold of the frog. This was only his second experience using a portkey and suffice to say that the first time Harry had ended up looking quite ill. This time was not any different. The poor boy’s cheeks were tinted green as he forced down the bile that rose in his throat. Charlie grimaced.

“Sorry about that but there’s no other way that would get us here in short time.” Charlie smiled lightly. “Welcome to Romania.”

Harry nodded and took a deep breath. It helped. The tint in his cheeks faded completely and he had regained his footing. Charlie shrunk Harry’s trunk and placed the object in his robes. He looked around face impassive.

“Let’s get a move on. We’ve got to take a train and we have a bit of a walk after. S’no easy place to get to, the Dragon Facility.”

“Can you tell me more about dragons and facility later?” Harry asked walking in step with the redhead.

“Interested in dragons or just magical creatures in general?” Charlie questions with a side glance.

“Magical creatures in general fascinate me.” Harry replied. “I don’t have a particular occupation in mind as to why, I just like studying them.” He continued knowing his companion would ask.

There are witches and wizards in the wizarding world which enjoy killing magical animals for potions, clothes and accessories. These things were not necessary. Potions ingredients can be taken by permission or if not then forcefully attained. It sounds cruel now but anything is better than killing the poor beast. This is why many were careful is what the told people who were engrossed with magical creatures. You never know who is going to end up what in the future.

The walk to the train station did not take long. Muggles paid no attention to their odd clothing as they made their way through the horde. Harry suspected that Charlie had used a notice-me-not charm on them. He could tell that it had not been a disillusionment charm, no cold trickle or sense of confusion had assaulted him.

It was only a few more minutes of walking until they arrived at the station. Charlie straightforwardly maneuvered his way to the furthest platform. Signs littered the station, none which Harry could read for they were written in Romanian. As they stepped past a magical barrier Harry saw the number of the train, 6½.

“The train will be here...” Charlie glanced at his watch. “10 minutes.”

The duo waited patiently as the train pulled up. It was a rusty red color and seemed to be dilapidated.

“Are you sure that’s safe?” Harry questioned dubiously. There was a reason why he was not a Gryffindor. Although brave he was not foolishly so and this train was a great example of when a Slytherin would question then board.

“Magic will keep it safe and running. This train is only used by us, muggles can’t even see it.” Charlie hoisted himself into the train. Harry followed quickly. They sat in a compartment near the middle of the train. Charlie sat down directly across from Harry.

“We’ll be there in an hour or so. Now, when we get there I want you to stay away from the dragons unless someone is with you. Hopefully I’ll be able to give you a tour of the grounds tomorrow. The facility is rather large and it is easy to get lost. There are no trees or plants. It’s more or less flat ground with short grass. The dragons would have burned everything which would have put us in danger so they removed the trees. The trees were moved to surround the circumference of the facility. They create a barrier of sorts. Bill and his friends were called there to ward the place and do some spells for them. The facility isn’t very old and when that happened I was still in school, my last year in fact. There are smaller holdings around but a bigger one was needed and so the Dragon Facility was built.”

Harry was interested he sat back and looked at Charlie curiously. “When was the facility formed?”

“It started up about 1989. Bill actually knew I was interested in dragons and told me about it. I graduated in 1990 and then went straight to work. You see, Bill had encouraged me to join and even helped me secure a job. I haven’t had any other job than what I do at the facility.

“Did you ever regret it?” The question slipped from Harry’s mouth before he could stop himself.

“I’ve been frustrated many times by my job. But I love it and have never regretted joining. We don’t have positions, we just have tasks. Everyone does what they are capable of, or what they are needed to do. The facility doesn’t accept uneducated members. They want knowledgeable people who know what they are doing and can train. The first year is spent training, and then you start small jobs. The further you progress the harder the tasks. It is an effective way to train employees in this field.”

Harry contemplated this. Charlie’s job was interesting and sounded quite fun. He did not have a specific job in mind for his future nor was

he considering one just yet. For the moment Harry chose to file the information away for later. He concentrated on the dragons he would see. A shiver, invisible mind you, made its way down his spine. Since he couldn't see them at the moment Harry settled for the next best thing.

"Can you tell me more about dragons? I only know what little books can tell me. Beyond the physical attributes, characteristics and uses of dragon's blood I know nothing." Harry confessed making himself comfortable for the long conversation ahead. Normally he wouldn't have been so open to a stranger but he knew Charlie since he had been a child. The older wizard had seen him before, had seen his vulnerable states. It was of no difference whether or not he saw Harry's mask slip from time to time.

Charlie hearing this beamed. "Well first I suppose I should tell you that the facility is kept in flat grounds because it's easier for us to keep track of the dragons. Normally they would live in mountains so it is a bit of a change of environment for them. There are many uses for dragons. Their hide is used to make clothing and particularly where the clothing is intended to double as protective gear. Swedish Short-Snout skin is particularly sought-after. You of course know about their dung properties and blood uses. You would know about potions ingredients as well Snape being your head of house.

"There are other reservations and facilities around besides the one in Romania. There's Hebrides, the MacFusty clan traditionally cares for their native dragons there. And in Wales, in the higher mountains there's another one. The last one is in Sweden, between Arjeplog and Kopparberg, the annual broom race goes right through it.

"You can find Dragons all over the world really. But they are more common in Europe. There's a few in Australia, Asia and South America as well. Only one particular breed resides in those continents though."

Charlie peered outside and stood. "This is our stop. I'll tell you about the types of Dragons some other time."

Harry stood fluidly and walked after him. They had only taken a few steps when the train jerked to a stop. Harry did not show his surprise

as they stepped off of the train and onto the flat grounds in the middle of nowhere. He stiffened his shoulders slightly as the train whipped past them sending a burst of air into their backs.

“We continue south from here. The walk will take an hour, give or take a few minutes.”

Harry fought not to groan. Their surroundings consisted of a stretch of short grass. In the far distance Harry could barely make out the tops of trees.

“Is that the surroundings to the Dragon Facility?”

Charlie grinned. “Yeah. The trees themselves will take about half an hour to get through. We’d better get going if we’re going to make it there by nightfall.”

Harry started walking noticing that the sun had already begun going down. The blue sky was now a dusky pink and about to get darker. In the far distance rain clouds had appeared. It looked to be about two days before they would hit. Both males were thankful for that. Neither wanted to get wet or walk through squishy uneven land. It had taken them a bit longer to get across the land but the timing was still good.

“Stick close, Harry. There aren’t very many creatures inhabiting the forest but there are loads of poisonous snakes. If you see one ignore it, they do not harm us if we leave them be. Humans aren’t food for them. The snakes feed on what little wildlife that is in there. Larger animals cannot be found because they are easy targets for the dragons. Adult animals know better than to go near dragons but their offspring don’t. The dragons spare no mercy when it comes to food. This caused many of the larger animals to depart, leaving only the small critters. Dragons don’t care for small amounts of food so they generally leave them alone.” Charlie grimaced slightly. “In my opinion it’s a good thing most predators left. Dragons are very messy eaters.”

Harry refrained from grimacing as well. It was for the better that no animals were there but Harry was particularly interested by the prospects of snakes. His ability to speak with them alleviated any fears serpents had ever held within him. The Slytherin was excited to see wild snakes. He had never seen a snake outside a cage before.

Harry had hardly left Potter Manor. The manor itself was warded against animals because James and Lily had feared for Jamie's safety. The only animals allowed to pass the wards were owls actually. When he had been young Harry had wanted to see animals, to see snakes.

A small thrill of excitement ran through Harry, perhaps he would get to talk to a few snakes. Not all snakes were good however. He would make sure to use protection charms when exploring. For now Harry would be content to look around. Self-idiocy assaulted him. Blaise, Theo, Draco and him should have practiced the spell to make their wands untraceable while they were at school. Harry felt extremely stupid at the moment and barely stopped himself from cursing. They had been so preoccupied the spell had been forgotten. Harry would need to remind his friends come September.

The surrounding was thick and full of flora. Had Harry not examined the area the forest, it could have passed off as normal. Upon closer inspection you could tell there had been little to no fauna in the woods. The musky air around them smelled of smoke and fire also making it seem unnatural. This gave off a sense of abandonment. In a way Harry liked the strange forest with its isolation.

"Harry, grab my hand. We're going to be passing the wards soon. They've been keyed into accepting you for the summer, but the first time is always a little confusing. Charms have been cast to puzzle muggles who wander here." Charlie explained stopping so Harry could sidle up to him in the narrow pathway.

Harry obediently took a hold of Charlie's hand. It was coarse and calloused. Small burns littered the sun kissed skin and Harry could feel the rough blistered burns easily.

"Brace yourself we're going to pass them now." Charlie warned.

Harry gripped the hand fractionally tighter as a wave of magic washed over them. Warnings went off in his mind making Harry feel as if he should back away and return to Hogwarts. This was not right. Sharply he tried to pry his hand out of Charlie's. The larger, stronger hand did not budge as it continued to pull him forward. Slytherin training was all that kept the boy from screaming.

Then, as soon as it had started it stopped. Harry leaned heavily against the tanned dragon keeper and whispered a 'thank you' breathing heavily. The wards were much more powerful than he thought. Someone who was submerged in the magic for too long could lose their mind in the haunting feelings.

"Are you alright? The first time is always brutal and different for us all. If you pass those wards again all you'll feel is a tingle or a spark from now on." Charlie helped Harry stand as they began making their way through the trees once again.

Harry's mind did not register this. It was fervently trying to remove the fear that still dwelled in him. When his senses came back Harry realized that it was dark. Small noises of footsteps and rustling cloth could be heard. Charlie sped up, nearly dragging his companion in the process.

The younger wizard closed his eyes and shielded his face as they burst through a particularly prickly bush. Emerald eyes widened as they took in the sight in front of them. Dozens of tents littered the flat grassy grounds. Surrounding those tents were various tools of all sized. In the far end of the field began rows of wooden cottages. The irony of the situation did not slip Harry. Thank the gods for magic.

Charlie led Harry to the far end along the stretch of the forest. After about a kilometer of walking the redhead stopped. He pulled out his wand and walked to a small cramped looking cottage with a small bronze plaque on its door. The number 19 was painted into the metal in bold black numerals. This seemed to be Charlie's cabin because he opened the door with a whisper and promptly walked in. Harry stepped into the home and felt a sharp prick in the middle of his palm. Wards. Thankfully these were much nicer than the ones in the forest.

After Harry saw the magically enlarged space within the cottage, it dawned on him that it had a homey feel to it. The rough wooden walls had portraits of the Weasley family and other random wizards. On the far wall Harry could make out a picture with Abby, Lucas, Tyler and Charlie. Harry's heart cramped painfully. Try as he could Harry could no longer deny he wanted a family. At the Potter Manor he had had no one to talk to or listen to concerning families so it had not mattered.

When Hogwarts came into the picture he was constantly around talk of mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. Being with the Malfoys had solidified his want for a parent. Many would not understand his need but Tom would. Tom always understood. Harry wished he could dream of Tom again. But alas, no dreams had come for a long time.

“It’s quite late Harry. Let’s eat and then go straight to bed. Tomorrow I’ll give you a tour of the facility.” Charlie said easily making his way into the kitchen.

They settled on simple ham sandwiches which filled them considerably and quickly. Charlie magically cleaned the dishes and led Harry into a guest room which was right next to the bathroom. It contained a chest of drawers, a closet, a small window, a writing desk and a comfortable bed. Charlie set Harry’s trunk at the base of the bed and enlarged it with a flick of his wand.

“Night, Harry.” Charlie grinned at him before leaving the room. Harry clambered into the bed with a quick change into pajamas. It was not long before sleep took the exhausted boy.

Sunshine streamed through the thin eyelids covering emerald green eyes. Harry blinked a few times as he stirred awake. Yawning, the soon to be 12 year old got out of bed. He gathered what supplies he needed and quickly used the bathroom. After his morning ritual was done Harry moved into the kitchen. He was not surprised to see Charlie standing at the stove making breakfast.

“Good morning Harry. I trust you slept well.” Charlie grinned roguishly.

Harry nodded and helped with breakfast. They ate quickly making small talk of the day’s events. Charlie told Harry that they would take a tour of the facility first. It would take the better part of the day so the elder wizard had not planned anything afterwards. Just as they left the cabin another wizard sprinted up to them. After taking in the wizard’s dark spiky hair and black eyes Harry remembered him as Lucas.

Lucas seemed to recognize him because he smiled lightly and said, "Hello Harry, it's good to see you." He turned to Charlie and a slightly worried expression took his face. "He's not healing very well; you'll need to see him again."

Harry was confused. Who were they talking about? Charlie scratched the back of head. "Bloody dragons." A sudden gleam entered his hazel eyes. "Say Lukey boy, I was just about to take Harry on a tour. You wouldn't mind doing it for me while I take care of him now would you?"

Lucas nodded looking exasperated at the horrid nickname. "Don't call me that. I've got nothing to do at the moment anyways so I suppose I could show Harry around."

"Excellent! Go on, you wouldn't want the sun to melt your precious hair should you stay in one place for too long."

"Piss off you bloody ponce." Lucas grumbled.

A single red brow arched. Lucas sneered slightly and took Harry's wrist before walking forcefully in the opposite direction. Harry did not comment nor question the spat. It was clearly not his business and it would best to abstain from commenting. It was obvious that Lucas was still angry. The tanned wizard smiled at Harry.

"Sorry about that. Charlie 'n me don't always get along. We share a lot of interests which is why we don't always get along all that well. You know what 'm saying? Sort of like that saying opposites attract except we're not opposites so we don't get on."

"Yes and no. But that's alright; I've got the gist of it." Harry responded.

"Good enough. Let's get going."

Lucas, Harry soon found out was cool and a little strange. He too loved creatures of all sizes. His humor was a bit on the strange side and a little sadistic if you asked Harry. It didn't take long before the young Slytherin to like Lucas. The wizard reminded him of Severus and Blaise. His dark looks contradicted his cheerful personality. When Harry had asked about his dark clothing the older man simply

laughed and said he liked dark clothing. The heat didn't seem to bother him and Harry suspected cooling charms had been cast on his clothes. The boy had gone to Hogwarts as well. It wasn't that surprising to hear that he was a Hufflepuff.

Had Harry not experienced his personality he would have seriously doubted the hat's judgment. Hufflepuffs had never really bothered him much before. Unlike Draco, Harry did not have any dislike for them. Their traits were hard work and loyalty. They were honorable in his opinion. The blond had agreed on this fact. Draco had given Harry this odd look when he had asked why they were disliked or looked down upon. "It's because they have no spine. They're content to stay back in the shadows and let people walk all over them. There are decent Hufflepuffs but the overall house gains no respect." Harry had understood this quite well actually and agreed with his best friend. Draco he found out had very plausible reasons for disliking the other houses.

Lucas confessed that he never really cared much for the houses. "It wasn't a big deal to me which house I ended up in really. Abby was with me in Hufflepuff. Charlie of course was ever the Gryffindor and Tyler was a Ravenclaw. We had a few acquaintances in Slytherin but no serious friendships. Times were bad then and not many in Slytherin could afford to form friendships outside their house. I used to feel sorry for them. Unfortunately for me they saw that and the next week I ended up in the hospital wing temporarily paralyzed. I've learned to accept them and not pity them since then."

Harry had clenched his jaw at the mention of pity but he relaxed as Lucas pointed out he had corrected his outlook. He had to force himself to think of the fact that the obsidian eyed man was indeed a Hufflepuff. They seemed to be the most compassionate out of all the Hogwarts houses. It was still insulting to hear that Slytherins were pitied but the others didn't know. The inner workings of the serpent house were complicated and unless you experienced it, it was difficult to understand. Pride had a lot to do with it but not all.

Lucas halted and pointed to four large barns. "We breed cattle for the dragons. They eat a lot and it's simpler to have a direct source of food rather than importing from others."

Harry could see hundreds of cows milling around the barns. A terrible odor of hay and dung drafted their way as the wind changed direction. Lucas quickly moved onward. They walked for the better part of the morning. Lucas showed Harry the armory, the workplace, and the offices.

The armory was not really used for armor. Inside they made harnesses, chains and other concoctions which would either contain the dragon or protect the wizard. The workplace was filled women. They made protective clothing for wizards and witches all over the world. It was all made from dragons. Harry learned that dragons shed once every two or three months which was how they gained clothing without slaughtering the beasts. The women were kind and even supplied Harry with new gloves. The preteen was grateful for these. His own were worn and he had no money to buy new ones. The issue of money once again came up. Perhaps he could work here for pay? He would ask Charlie about it. The offices were quite boring. Piles of parchment lay about over desks, under chairs and in rubbish bins. People could be found writing, reading, sketching and discussing at every corner

"The offices get used quite often. We need legal documents for new dragons, birthing certificates and death certificates. There are a lot of hybrid dragons which also need to be researched and examined. There's a lot of paper work involved with the Dragon Facility as it is the largest one."

An elder witch glared at them and shooed them out of the offices claiming it was crowded enough and loitering was only taking up more space. Lucas led them past the office and up north. Near the edge of the forest they stopped. A sly smile twisted the man's lips as he looked down at Harry.

"We're about to step into the mating alcoves."

Harry's eyes widened. A mating dragon was dangerous. Lucas carefully stepped into the forest deliberately walking with light steps. Harry followed his example. It was not long until they were in what appeared to be a clearing.

"Abby!" Lucas called out softly.

The petite blonde witch appeared within second and grinned up at Lucas. "Hullo Luc. What brings you here?"

Harry noticed a faint tinge appear on Lucas' cheeks and wondered what was wrong. Abby did not seem to see this and instead caught sight of Harry.

"I suspect he's giving you a tour love." Abigail smiled crookedly and beckoned for them to follow. She pointed stopped at the end of the clearing and pointed into the dark alcoves magically formed. They were enormous.

Harry's mouth parted slightly as he took in the view. A mother dragon was breathing fire over half a dozen red eggs. They were roughly the size of a Quaffle if not a bit larger. It was like looking at a painting. Harry was amazed and found that this was the best part of his day. Abby and Luc backed away and gently guided the boy away from the dragon.

"Incredible isn't it?" Abby asked wistfully sending a glance at Lucas.

Harry caught this too but was even more confused. Lucas himself did not catch the look as he was staring firmly at the ground.

"It's wonderful." Harry chose to reply.

"I'm glad you think so. I've always loved watching them, the mother dragons." Abigail sat down on the roots of a tree.

Lucas grinned. "Abby practically lives here. No one has dared to try and take this job from her. In many ways she's like a dragon herself." He joked.

"Shut up Lucas." Abby glared teasingly. "Get going now. You're very presence irritates me."

"You know you lurve me." Lucas gave her a winning smile.

"Yeah, yeah. Now get!" She pointed towards the direction of the exit. Deferentially they left leaving the pretty woman with her dragon ladies.

The next area that they went to was an infirmary of sorts. "Tyler works here most of the time being the certified medi-wizard that he is."

There weren't many patients in the beds and the few that were had quite a few nasty burns on them. Tyler was at the moment applying potions to some burns on a younger wizard who looked to be 19 or 20.

"Lucas, Harry." Tyler greeted. He finished rubbing the potion onto the burns and washed his hands. "How has the tour been going?"

"Well enough." Lucas replied easily leaning against a bed. "Charlie been to see you yet?"

"Aye, he jogged off with a load of bandages. Norbert's wounds haven't been healing well."

"Norbert?" Harry interrupted. "The same Norbert you carted off from Hogwarts?"

"Aye lad, the one and the same." Tyler grinned. "He got himself into a nasty accident with one of the older dragons, led to a pretty deep gash along his leg. Charlie was working on the poor thing before he came to get you. We all thought that it was alright but a bit of venom got into the cut. Nothing serious, mind you but enough so that the cut reopened. Charlie'll have him fixed up in a jiffy though. Nothing to worry about really."

"Can we see Norbert?" Harry asked.

"You might as well take him Lucas; Charlie might need some of your help anyways." Tyler waved them off as the sable-haired dragon keeper led them away from the infirmary.

It was not long before they stood in front of a tall iron gate. Surrounding it were 50 foot walls crackling with magic. "We keep the dragons here." Lucas said opening the gate with a whisper.

Lucas walked in normally, while Harry stepped forward hesitantly. Only 60 or 70 feet away from the gate was a dragon. More dragons

were lined up along the way. Most were sleeping. Their snouts were muzzles, their legs secured by anchors. It was barbaric in a way but there was nothing else they could do. The dragons would hurt not only themselves but others as well.

“They do have some freedom.” Lucas interrupted his musings. “We have magical barriers all around and about once a week we let the dragons out of their harnesses to fly around. Soon we won’t need to muzzle them and chain them. We’ve been working on a compulsion potion. It won’t take their free will but it will be enough so that they don’t harm others for no rational reason. They would retain their ability to protect their young in the face of danger and themselves but blood would no longer be shed on a whim. It is the only way we can really allow them to live with freedom. They are too large to release into the wild and they are too ferocious to allow amongst people. It breaks my heart to see the results come to this but it is the most we can do for them.”

Harry felt subdued about the magnificent beasts he saw. It was distressing that they could not live with a completely free mind. At least with the potion they could survive without being chained and have rational minds. Dragons were intelligent creatures of course, but they were blinded by their bloodlust. Lucas patted his shoulder sympathetically; most of the people working at the Dragon Facility felt this way as well.

“Charlie!” Lucas yelled alerting the freckled redhead to their presence.

Charlie turned around and grinned. “Did you enjoy the tour Harry?”

Harry nodded and looked past the man to see an almost fully grown Norwegian Ridgeback. “He’s beautiful.” Harry spoke mesmerized.

The emerald eyed boy then saw what was wrong. A deep angry gash bled slightly on Norbert’s left leg. The poor dragon shifted it slightly and growled in pain. “Is there any way I can help?” Harry asked stone faced.

Charlie nodded towards a large pile of unwrapped bandages. “You could roll those bandages up in you want.”

This reminded Harry of asking Charlie for a job. "Charlie, I was hoping I could get a job around here for the summer?"

He needed the money for school supplies and next Christmas. Draco's birthday had already come and gone. Harry had felt ashamed for not being able to buy anything as he had no money. Draco had assured him that it was alright. It still brought shame to the preteen, especially since his friend had said he would buy Harry the best birthday gift ever. Harry would earn money somehow, he would save for his school supplies, Christmas and a belated birthday present for Draco.

Charlie frowned slightly and nodded in understanding having come from a poor family himself. "There'll be plenty of paid jobs around here that you could do."

Harry grinned at the wizard in thanks and began rolling bandaged. What respect he had for Charlie and the elder Weasleys raised a few notches. They were hardworking people who managed to get by even with their little income. Work was not a hard prospect for Harry, he was glad that someone understood his dilemma. It was embarrassing and for that reason he was glad it was Charlie Weasley who had been appointed guardianship instead of someone else.

Chapter 2

What of Slytherin?

:Dream:

Harry appeared in a dimly lit room. After closer inspection he realized that this was a prefect's room. Questions upon questions piled in his mind as he sought out answers.

"Who's there?" called out a slightly deep masculine voice.

Harry swiveled around to face a handsome teenager. His dark hair framed his face alluringly and his azure eyes pierced Harry's emerald. The boy looked very familiar.

"Tom?" Harry whispered in shock.

Tom nodded warily and frowned. His eyes widened slightly then reverted back to their original state of blankness. Had Harry not been trained in reading people he would have never noticed the expression.

"Harry. You came back." Tom reached out and placed his hand on the smaller boy's shoulder.

Harry nodded. "I never realized it had been this long." Tentatively he wrapped his arms around the older boy. He had truthfully missed him.

"It's been almost two years since I last saw you," Tom whispered into Harry's jet black hair. "I almost began to forget you."

Harry gripped the boy tightly afraid to let go. Tom seemed to have no problem with this and steered them to the bed. They sat down together, Harry ending up in Tom's lap. A comfortable, welcome silence lasted for only minutes before both spilled what they had been doing for the last little while. Tom told him about his studies and quest for power. Harry told his companion about the dragons and Romania. The soon-to-be second year left out Voldemort and the Philosopher's stone. He didn't want to talk of it at the moment. Perhaps later he would tell Tom but not now.

"Harry, have you read much of our house founder?" Tom asked stoically, deceptively.

"What of Slytherin?" Harry asked leaning into the warmth.

"His past, his ideas and his dedication to Hogwarts," Tom spoke with zealot.

"I have not been able to find much on his past but I know well of his opinions and devotion." Harry looked up blankly, a small spark of curiosity sparkled in his eye. "What are you plotting now Tom?"

"I can't tell you yet. I myself am not entirely sure whether or not my information is enough to show me the way."

Harry sharply looked at Tom. "Find the way where?" Something dark coiled in his mind. It seemed neither bad nor good but it felt dangerous. Suddenly Harry was even more curious. He looked at Tom expectantly.

Tom shook his head. "The secret of Salazar Slytherin and his heirs. If I succeed in my quest I will tell you where."

Tom smiled menacingly as he looked at the wall of his room. "I am his heir."

"What?" Harry stiffened in shock.

"I am the heir of Slytherin, Harry. My mother she was a pureblood. She came from a long line of purebloods that were related to Salazar Slytherin. Only I can go in." A sinister smile turned the handsome face dark and foreboding. "I will fulfill what he set out to do." Tom smirked at Harry. "I wish you could join me purge the school of mudbloods."

"I don't know whether I would want to murder muggleborns. It is true that they harbor less power than us. It is also true that they are the cause of so many muggles knowing of us but I do not want them dead. I want them to be given a choice. It would be the simpler way in my opinion. Why wage a war when you can use politics and

economics to defeat them?" Harry smiled slightly reminding Tom exactly why Harry was a Slytherin.

"We share a common goal although our methods are different," Tom supplied indifferently. "Perhaps both ideas will work together. Maybe if I'm still alive 50 years from now we could somehow find each other. I doubt it will happen. My memories of you will not be present in the future Tom Riddle (if he is alive). I myself would need to be in your time as my teen self to activate what memories I have of you. It is complicated but I have spent the last two years thinking of this. It is the most plausible theory I have come up with." Tom's blue eyes glinted. "If I am alive you will need to reacquaint yourself with me for I will not remember you."

Harry frowned. "I don't have access to wizarding records so I can't locate whether you are alive or not. Had I been able to get into the records I would have started my search for you long ago. Unfortunately only ministry workers can look through and at the moment I have no one in the ministry who will let me search the records."

"Bugger," Tom sighed. "Damn."

Harry cursed under his breath as his body began fading. Quickly he gave Tom a quick hug. Tom bent down and pecked Harry's lips. "Be careful and look for me." The older Slytherin muttered. Harry nodded before disappearing.

:End Dream:

Harry woke abruptly. He took in a deep breath and expelled it slowly before making his way into the bathroom. A shower was taken quickly and his teeth brushed. Harry stopped in front of the mirror and stared. His hair in its natural form had always been messy. After using various wizarding gels he had managed to get his hair to look wavy instead, it seemed as if they had taken a permanent effect on his hair. Although it was not as neat as using gel, it was certainly no longer the mop of unruly black hair. It lay in heavy waves around his face falling to his earlobe.

Harry's eyes fell upon the inch long scar on his cheek. Lightly he traced the faint scar. It had come from the woman he had once considered his mother. Unexpected pain shot through the boy. Harry did not understand why he felt this way. That had been in the past, he had gotten over it. To his horror, Harry did not completely believe it. Putting logic into use the young Slytherin decided that because she bore him and his blood was of the Potter family, he still held some sort of bond to her. This frightened Harry very much.

Harry did not get to think long on such things however and his fear was pushed aside for the moment when he heard Charlie calling him into the kitchen. Harry quickly got dressed and entered the small kitchen. An average breakfast was placed on the table and Harry found himself devouring the food. Of course, he did not inhale it like certain Weasleys. Harry had had too much practice with manners to do such a thing. He calmly ate the food at a fast pace. Charlie looked at him in awe. How Harry had managed to eat his breakfast in under 3 minutes while not breaking his impeccable table manners, he would never know.

Charlie cleared his throat slightly. "We'll be working with Norbert again today. Luc says he's got a job offering for you already, something about running errands. Think about it as we walk down to the Carcer."

"Prison?" Harry looked up sharply at Charlie.

The freckled man grimaced. "The dragon keepers are very truthful people. We prefer not to sugar coat our words when concerning dragons especially. As much as it pains us we call the holding where the dragons are kept, the Carcer, or the prison."

Harry's respect for the dragon keepers and Charlie specifically increased. These people loved dragons, yet they had made sure to call their holding what it was; a prison for dragons. The Slytherin could see how much it pained Charlie and decided not to bring it up any further.

Charlie grinned and the tension broke. "Let's get going. Knowing Lucas, he's probably plotting things for you to do all summer. Let me tell you, not all of those errands will be pleasant."

“Look who decided to finally show up.” Lucas glared at Charlie. “I’ve been waiting for nearly five minutes! Poor Norbert has been in pain for an additional five minutes because you decided that sleep was more important.”

“Oh just shut up you bloody sod. It’s far too early for this.” Charlie walked off towards Norbert and brought out his wand.

Lucas turned to Harry with a grin. “Right, now that your guardian’s gone let’s get down to business. I’ve got a proposition with you. I get a list of errands about a foot long every week. For every one of them you finish I’ll pay you a galleon. The facility is large and this involves a lot of traveling so it’s a fair amount, it’s what I get paid to do. And before you ask, No. I won’t be losing money by giving you this job. I’ve got another job waiting for me that requires my full attention so this is a bit of a reliever actually. So what do you say?”

Harry nodded. “I’ll get started right away.”

“Good lad!” Lucas gave him the list and trotted off.

Harry quickly ran up to Charlie. He watched for a few minutes as Charlie directed a needle with his wand. It pushed through the cut flesh of Norbert and stitched up the wound. The wand and needle never wavered. Soon sweat drops could be seen gathering up on Charlie’s brow. When Charlie was done the difficult task he turned to Harry.

Harry held up the parchment. “I’ve accepted to do errands for Lucas.”

Charlie nodded. “Alright, it’ll take almost all day for you to finish those so I’ll meet you back at my house at noon and then for supper.” Harry nodded and left.

A few weeks had passed without incident. During those weeks Harry had performed many odd jobs for the dragon keepers and had made enough money to secure his next year at Hogwarts. During that time Charlie had also shown him the different types of dragons.

Altogether he had been told there were 10 different species of dragons. The first was an Antipodean Opaleye. It was native to New Zealand and Australia and usually resided in valleys. Its scales were an iridescent pearly colour and it grew to a medium size for a dragon. Their eyes were told to be beautiful, multicolored glittering orbs that held no pupils. And the flame they spat was a vivid red instead of the usual orange.

The second was a Chinese Fireball. Naturally this dragon's habitat was in China and could be found in the mountains. Its scarlet scales with a fringe of golden spikes around its face gave its protruding eyes a vicious look. The flame from this dragon was unusually mushroom shaped and like any other dragon flame, could burn whole you within seconds.

The Common Welsh Green seemed to be the most boring dragon to Harry. It lived in Wales up in the higher mountains. It had green scales and shot its flames in narrow jets.

Quite a nasty blighter was the Hungarian Horntail. It came from Hungary and could blaze a flame up to fifty feet. Its appearance consisted of black scales, bronze horns, and a spiked tail. The yellow, vertical pupil eyes of the Hungarian Horntail were enough to tell you that it was even more dangerous than the others.

Then of course there was the Norwegian Ridgeback, all the way from Norway. Charlie had said that like most dragons, the Norwegian Ridgeback's habitat lay in the mountains. It had black scales, bronze horns, and black ridges on its back. And from Harry's personal experience, the fangs were venomous.

Then there was the smallest of all dragons, the Peruvian Vipertooth. It grew to 15 feet in length and what it lacked for in size it gained in poisonous fangs. Peruvian Vipertooths were commonly found in the mountains of eastern Peru. Their smooth scales of copper and short horns gave it one of the least dangerous looks concerning dragons.

The dragon of Transylvania the Romanian Longhorn was the most common dragon at the facility. Wild dragons from the mountains in Romania were the easiest to gather. Its dark green scales and long glittering golden horn particularly made it stand out in the stony mountains.

Harry had found himself at awe with the next dragon because of its amazing ability to breathe brilliant blue flames. The Swedish Short-Snout found in the wild, uninhabited mountain areas of Sweden had captivated him with its beautiful silvery-blue colour. Harry had vaguely noticed that its scales were the same colour of Draco's eyes.

Then there was the Ukrainian Ironbelly, known to be the largest breed of dragon weighing up to six tons. It was native to the Ukrainian mountains. Its metallic grey scales glinted brightly in sun and its long talons seemed like daggers waiting to rip apart flesh. Its eyes reminded Harry of Voldemort and he had found himself drawn to the deep red gaze of the elderly dragon the facility held.

The only dragon that the facility did not have in the Carcer was the Hebridean Black dragon. It was native to Hebrides and grew up to 30 feet in length. Its eyes were a deep purple and its body was a combination of dark rough scales, ridges along the back, and a spiked tail. This from the picture Harry had seen contrasted quite nicely with its bright purple eyes.

Proudly, Harry could successfully say that he knew more about dragons than what books would tell you.

It was now July 29th and Harry was opening a letter from Draco. He had received two letters from his best friend before this. Draco had asked frequently if Harry could come to stay over at Malfoy Manor for a week. Apologetically, Harry had refused saying that he needed to work if he wanted enough money to be able to buy his school supplies. Draco had reluctantly said he understood. His askance however was once again written in his latest letter.

Dear Harry,

Mother and I will be appearing in Diagon Alley the afternoon of the 29th. I'm sorry for the late notice but I was informed unexpectedly of our trip. Please ask Mr. Weasley if he will allow you to come join us in Diagon Alley. Perhaps this time you will come back with me to Malfoy Manor for only a week.

Eagerly awaiting your presence,

Draco

Harry bit his lip. He had gotten his Hogwarts letter already. It wouldn't hurt to go, especially since he had earned enough money for his materials. Smiling slightly Harry slipped the letter into his trunk and went to ask Charlie. The redheaded man said it was okay. They left immediately since it was already 11a.m already. Harry gathered his money before the duo left. The trip to the floo point was quick and Harry found himself in Diagon Alley within a few minutes standing next to Charlie.

"We've got an hour. Is there anything specific you want to do?" Charlie questioned walking in stride with Harry.

"I've got to buy Draco a birthday gift. His birthday was a little while ago but I didn't have money to buy him anything then," Harry replied successfully covering the blush of shame.

"Anything in mind or do you want to look around?"

"I don't know where to start looking," Harry admitted.

"What does he like?" Charlie swerved around an old witch as she came barreling down the street.

"Quidditch, books to a point, and clothes I suppose," Harry said remembering the huge wardrobe of clothing that the blond boy had had.

"Well, why don't you buy him a *Broomstick Servicing Kit*?"

Harry stopped and turned to stare at Charlie. A small smile broke out on his impassive face. "You're a genius Charlie."

The second eldest Weasley child beamed. "Of course I am."

They quickly made their way to the Quidditch store and bought a nice slightly expensive one. It cost a bit more than Harry could afford but Charlie pitched in. He told Harry that he could pay him back. The black-haired boy had thanked him. The *Broomstick Servicing Kit* that Harry had gotten was made of oak and had a thick leather cover. In silver writing, Harry had asked for them to inscribe Draco's name on the kit. He smiled at the effect and took the now wrapped parcel. It was perfect.

"If we start walking to Flourish and Blotts, we'll be there in time to meet your friend," Charlie said looking at his watch.

They set off walking through the crowd quickly. As they neared Flourish and Blotts, Harry could see a rather large horde gathered around the shop.

"Harry!" Said boy turned around to see Draco waving him over.

Harry smiled slightly and held the parcel in his hands a bit tighter as he and Charlie walked over. Narcissa swept Harry into a short hug and tried not to hold on for too long. Public image was important and as much as Narcissa would have liked to squeeze the petit boy she refrained from doing so. Draco gave Harry an equally small hug. He smiled faintly at his friend.

"We were just heading over to Flourish and Blotts to grab Harry's books. Don't know why it's so crowded though." Charlie muttered scratching the back of his head.

"Gilderoy Lockhart is signing autographs inside." Narcissa sniffed daintily showing her dislike for Lockhart.

"The fake?" Harry questioned.

Draco nodded stiffly. "The very same."

Charlie chuckled. "You Slytherins always did have the blackmail on everyone. But just let me tell you this, be careful around him. The prat isn't as useless as we think. We might as well go try and get your books."

Carefully they made their way through the lines and groups of witches and some wizards. Surprisingly it did not take all that long for them to get their books. Harry and Draco were only missing their defense books. There was little space so to save time the brunet offered to get the books and meet them at the checkout.

The defense books were well stocked and Harry found himself disgusted at having to buy them. He plucked two texts off the shelf and caught sight of Jamie. She did not notice his presence and looked immersed in a rather thin book on defense against the dark arts. *How odd* Harry thought. She really is taking her life more seriously. I suppose after experiencing near death anyone would try to learn how to protect themselves better.

Harry could see that she was struggling somewhat with the words in the book and bit back a chuckle. Jamie might be trying to gain some knowledge but it didn't mean it would come to her. Granger would probably be her best bet should she attempt to try studying. Once again the ex-Potter pointed out that he would need to watch her closely.

Hurriedly they left the shop intent on getting away from Lockhart. Neither Draco nor Harry wanted to see the idiot until they absolutely had no choice. The next stop was Madam Malkin's for new school robes. Both boys had grown a little taller this year and their robes barely covered their ankles. After being fitted the duo went to pay for their clothing. Just as Harry was about to bring out his money Draco stopped him.

"Consider these your birthday gift." Draco smiled slightly as Narcissa paid for their robes.

Harry frowned but accepted the gesture. It was nice of the boy to get him something he would need rather than a useless trinket. And besides, if there was one thing that his mother had taught him it was

to accept gifts politely. Refusing such presents was considered a rude gesture.

Charlie saw Harry's reluctance and gave him an encouraging smile. Harry was eleven, stubborn and had much pride. At this young of an age he did not understand the full impact of such gifts. They were not a blow to his pride at all considering he was only a boy but they were a genuine show of friendship. Charlie knew the purebloods were taught this early in their years and respected Draco a bit more for showing Harry such friendship. Perhaps later, when they had time he would be able to tell Harry more of pureblood customs and gift giving.

Chapter 3

Quarrel

The quartet made their way to the Leaky Cauldron. Inside they took seats in the far corner to simply talk.

“Draco has expressed his interest in having Harry stay at Malfoy Manor if only for one week. Would it be possible for such an arrangement?” Narcissa asked impassively.

Harry took a quick look at Draco, his own face blank. The boy was watching Harry with an equally stoic look. His grey eyes however hinted at hope. It was obvious to Harry that Draco truly did miss him. With this in mind Harry mentally accepted the offer.

Charlie cleared his throat slightly. “It’s up to Harry whether or not he wants to go. I know he’s been doing some work at the Dragon Facility and might have some projects and errands to finish up as well.”

Harry blinked. He had almost forgotten about his jobs. “I will agree to stay but only for the duration of three days.”

Draco’s eyes lit up with a smile, although he remained aloof outwardly as the Malfoy name demanded. Narcissa nodded sharply but even Charlie could tell he was pleased. “I shall send him by the floo network tomorrow if that is all right with you?”

“Perfectly fine. Come Draco, we must prepare and tell your father. It would do us no good to have him surprised.” Narcissa stood fluidly and left the pub with Draco in tow.

“Are you sure about this?” Charlie asked hesitantly.

Harry nodded and smiled slightly at the man. "I've missed Draco and this is probably the only chance we'll have of meeting before school begins. I can afford to miss four days of work, including today, for this."

"Sit down for a moment." Charlie moved to stand in front of the now seated boy. "I know your pride was wounded when Draco paid for your robes but you must understand that it was a sign of friendship. Purebloods rarely buy items of use for one another. Because they have the wealth, presents are not exchanged amongst them. Only weddings and other formal events even warrant the thought of a gift. And even then those presents are useless and hold some value and beauty. When one receives something of use or personal value it indicates great affection. You should be honored that the Malfoy heir showed such emotion in public."

Harry's face was emotionless and Charlie could not read any emotion. He didn't know what his ward was thinking but the elder wizard hoped that Harry would understand. It was not charity what Malfoy had done; it was affectionate and demonstrated the strength of their friendship.

Harry meanwhile thought the opposite. He had never been shown kindness in public and it made him think that there were ulterior motives behind it all. The Malfoys lived on image as well as power. Could Draco have paid for the robes as an open announcement that he would fund Harry? The same boy who was disowned and humiliated publicly. It was a great way to earn the respect and favour of many witches and wizards. He barely knew Draco when you thought about it. They had only known each other for one *school* year.

The trip to Malfoy Manor had other purposes than just meeting Draco. Harry planned to watch the blond carefully and see if their friendship was as true as he hoped. The Malfoys did have to rebuild their reputation, especially since the first war. And Harry was one of the best candidates to start on. It would not matter that Harry was the orphaned boy of James and Lily Potter. The fact that Harry was smart and fragile looking would be enough to melt the wizarding world's hearts.

They truly would not believe that this little boy was more powerful than they thought. They would not think he possessed knowledge above his years. They would only see the good that the Malfoys were doing in presenting him with a room in their manor, providing clothing and funding for other school necessities. It was sickening to even think about. The first friend Harry had ever made would be nothing more than an elaborate but effective scheme.

But first, it had to be proved true!

Emerald eyes refused to soften, refused to well up with tears of hurt when their owner thought of such a theory. Charlie seemed to realize Harry's thoughts but his little lecture did not help. In fact it only seemed to provide more evidence *against* Draco, Lucius and Narcissa. Harry blanked his face more securely and resumed packing his clothes for the trip.

It would not do to show his emotions. He had let himself go during his year at Hogwarts. Emotions were weaknesses and anyone who was smart enough could use his feelings against him. Inwardly the Slytherin scolded himself for being so open. He would rectify that immediately.

Draco was waiting for Harry when he arrived the next day. The emerald-eyed boy carried a small suitcase with all his necessities needed for a three day stay. The blond grinned and hugged Harry before stepping out of his personal space.

"Mother and father wanted to greet you but they were needed elsewhere. Have you brought your key?" Grey eyes lit up when Harry nodded. "You'll be sleeping in your own room."

Harry smiled at Draco's enthusiasm and followed the wizard as he walked through the halls of the large manor. Harry had missed Malfoy Manor more than he had realized. The hallways seemed longer and the distance more tiring. But Harry was far from tired. He wanted to

see *his* room. It would probably be the most valuable thing he had despite not owning it.

Draco stopped and turned to face a pair of cream colored double doors. Harry barely refrained from gasping. The Malfoys really meant it when they said he would be given a room. By the size of the doors he could tell that this room would be as big as Draco's.

"I picked it out," Draco offered at Harry's lack of speech.

The still shocked Slytherin carefully pulled out the key for the room and inserted it into the doorknob. Draco entered the room first while Harry took out the key and stored it safely within his robe. With bated breath the boy stepped into his room and looked around.

The walls were coated with the same nice cream colour as the doors. It was bordered with black and delicate vines of silver swirled through it. The floor was laid out in planks of cherry wood. Rugs of white fur were placed strategically around the room. A large fireplace made entirely of iron blazed to life with a fire. In front of it was another fluffy rug.

Harry's attention was drawn to the bed. It was odd, to say the least. The frame was large enough to comfortably sleep four people and was made of the same iron used for the fireplace. Thick mattresses were covered with cashmere cream colored sheets and large square shaped pillows. Comparing this to the bed he had had at Potter manor and at Charlie's cottage, Harry was amazed.

Fortunately his mind was not completely dazed. A semi-intelligent sentence managed to fall out of his mouth. "It's very accommodating."

Draco hid a smirk. The rooms at Malfoy Manor were grand and elegant. They were not cluttered with trinkets and unnecessary items but rather laid out in a simple fashion. This added to the beauty of the manor. This did not mean that it looked any less spectacular. The furnishings of the rooms were classy, dressy and somewhat overly expensive. But his mother had insisted on them and Lucius however proud could not deny his wife the wealth of being a Malfoy.

When Narcissa had been informed of Draco's proposal to give Harry a room in the manor she had delighted in furnishing the room. The blonde woman had taken measures to make sure neither her son nor husband interfered. It had taken a week for her to design the simple room but when she had finished the end product was perfect.

"You can use my spare broom." Draco offered.

"Maybe later-" Harry did not bother looking up from his book. Currently he lay on his bed with a small book in his hands. Draco had repetitively asked him to play Quidditch with him in the last hour and Harry was nowhere near ready to give in.

"Reading is a poor substitute for friendship, Harry. I haven't seen you for almost a month and all you've done so far is read. Perhaps inviting you to stay was a terrible idea," Draco said slyly.

Damn. Harry bookmarked his page and got off the bed. He fixed Draco with a cold look. "Let's go."

Draco smirked. "'Knew you'd see it my way. Now come on, we've lost valuable time. I want to win at least twice before getting called in for lunch."

Harry smiled slightly at the pure arrogance in his friend. Draco seeing Harry's smile broke out in one of his faint grins. They ran down to the Quidditch pitch and breathed in the country air. Draco motioned for Harry to follow him. He led the way to a large broom shed. Inside there were what looked to be one hundred broomsticks. Old models, new models and some which Harry had never seen were laid along racks.

Draco did not even think before he moved to a rack closer to the door. He picked up two Nimbus Two Thousands and held one out for Harry. The shorter boy mounted his broom and flew out of the shed with accuracy. Draco followed easily and they performed a few laps

around the pitch. The wind whipped through their hair giving both tousled appearances within a matter of seconds.

The duo laughed as they did tricks around one another. Quidditch was entirely forgotten as Harry and Draco got lost in simply flying with each other.

Draco nudged Harry slightly as they walked back into the manor from their flight. He motioned towards a partially open door. From their standing they could see Lucius Malfoy quite clearly. Curious the two stood and watched as he reached into his desk and pulled out a leather bound book. Lucius did not open the book as they expected but turned to look at them instead.

Draco cursed under his breath as his father came out of the office book and all. He leveled the boys with a stony glare and opened his office door wider. Inwardly the dark wizard scolded himself for being as careless as to leaving his door open. Once the two were seated and inside, Lucius closed the door and took a seat behind his desk.

"I know what you were doing and will not waste my time lecturing you on the idiocy of eavesdropping." *recklessly*, Lucius thought. "I trust you will not speak a word of what you have seen to anyone?"

Draco and Harry nodded brusquely in fear of what the man might do to them if they did. Lucius placed the book on the desk giving Harry and Draco a full view of the book. It was not a book but a diary they discovered, a shabby diary at that. Written in gold letters along the bottom of the book was the date, it told Harry that the book was 50 years old.

"Who does the diary belong to father?" Draco inquired cautiously.

Lucius paused as if thinking whether his son and Harry were trustworthy enough to know. Coming to a decision he opened the book to its first page. Harry barely made out the faded letter which

spelled T. M. Riddle. He froze but kept up the appearance of a guarded young man.

"Would you mind if I looked at it, sir?" Harry asked politely.

Lucius tucked the diary into his robe. "I'd rather you didn't, Harry. The diary is rather dangerous and we wouldn't want harm to befall on you. Both of you may go now"

Harry nodded with disappointment. He ignored the dark look Draco gave him and left the office. His mind was a whirl of thoughts. The one thought that stood out the most disturbed him quite a bit.

T. M. Riddle... Tom M. Riddle.

Was it just a coincidence? Other facts added up to the same. Tom was at Hogwarts fifty years ago. His initials were the exact same and the diary looked to be a muggle diary. It was not expensive looking and it did not contain an ounce of elegance that a well paid book would cost. Tom was poor and lived in an orphanage during the summers. He could have easily bought such an item from a nearby shop or even have stolen it.

What got to Harry quite a bit was that the diary was dangerous. Was Lucius lying to prevent Harry from reading it or did he truly mean it when he said it would harm him? The only realistic way to confirm that theory was to actually look through the book. But the chances of it happening were slim. Hopefully tonight he would dream of Tom and get some questions answered.

During his thinking period, Harry had not realized that Draco had taken a hold of his arm. The blond had maneuvered them to his own room. From what Harry could see the room had not changed since the last time he had been here. Draco was looking at him expectantly and when Harry gave forth no answers his patience gave way.

"Why would you want the diary Harry?" Draco demanded looking at him with intense silver eyes.

"I was curious," he easily lied.

“Don’t lie to me, I can tell there is more to it than that. While you’re in my room and my home it would be better to tell me.” Draco’s tone had taken a tone of commandment. Apparently he was tired of Harry’s secrets.

“Don’t dare to presume you can order me around, Malfoy.” Harry growled.

“What’s with you?” Draco glared at the brunet. “You’ve been acting off since you came here and now you’re asking of things that my father is dealing with. You *know* what he was and you know that he holds dangerous possessions. What could make you want Tom Riddle’s diary so much as to ask for a potentially dangerous object? Tell me, Harry.”

Harry turned away from Draco and refused to meet his eyes. The Malfoy heir was not done with his best friend yet. He stormed up to him and gripped his shoulder tightly. Harry spun around and knocked the hand away from him. “Don’t touch me! Don’t ever touch me!”

“Why are you being such an arse?” Draco hissed. His nose flared angrily.

Harry’s face went blank. “Am I a charity case to you? Do you remain friends with me only to benefit your reputation?” Harry slowly walked towards the stunned boy. His steps were leisurely. “Why would you, Draco Malfoy, befriend me? Why would you stand up for me when you had nothing to gain and everything to lose? Tell me Draco,” he purred, “what are you gaining in this aside from social status?”

By now Harry was standing toe to toe with Draco who was glaring fiercely. They stood in silence for a while never breaking eye contact. The blond finally snapped and gave Harry an evil smile. “You want to know why? I did it because I pitied you at first. You sat in a compartment all alone with nothing but books to keep you company. By befriending you I thought perhaps you would be a good study partner, someone who could help me with lessons and nothing else. You were a charity case in some sense and when you were sorted into Slytherin it became even more beneficiary for me. The fact that you are truly the boy-who-lived was the *crème de crème* of it all. After

all being the *best friend* of the savior of the wizarding world would have its advantages.”

Harry did not stick around to hear the rest. He lost all composure and ran from the room. Tears had gathered in his eyes but he would not let them fall. Quickly the anguished wizard entered his room and locked the door. Thankfully no one had seen him and Draco had yet to follow his now presumably ex-friend.

Breathing heavily, he packed his clothes and other trinkets he had brought with him. With a heavy heart Harry pulled out a slip of parchment and wrote a letter to Charlie.

Dear Charlie,

It is of best interest if you would come to Malfoy Manor as soon as you possibly can. I cannot stay here for another two days, I must leave. Please come and take me back to the Facility.

Harry

Harry picked up his suitcase and left his room. The key to it was safely tucked in his robes. His sharp green eyes scanned the hallways as he made his way to Lucius’ office. Once there he knocked sharply on the door. It seemed rude but he needed to leave. One more word from Draco would set him off the edge, which could mean that his magic would turn destructive. He had kept it at bay so far but it was teetering on the edge.

The door was pulled open to reveal not only Lucius but Narcissa as well. They looked at him curiously. Narcissa seemed more worried than curious when she noticed Harry’s hardened expression.

“I am sorry Mr. Malfoy, Mrs. Malfoy. But I must leave. I have sent a letter to Charlie to take me back to the Facility. He will most likely be here within the hour. Once again I apologize for my rude and abrupt departure.”

Narcissa placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “What happened? Is Draco responsible?”

Harry looked at the Malfoy matriarch and gave her a faint smile. "No, Mrs. Malfoy," he lied. "It is of no importance but it is urgent for me to leave immediately. You do not need to be burdened with the cause."

His words were the polite way of telling her that he didn't want to tell her what had happened. In a way Narcissa was hurt at the words but she acknowledged the fact that she was neither his mother nor very close with him. The boy did not know her all that well and trust took time. The regal woman accepted his answer and nodded to show her forgiveness. Lucius was more formal and took Harry to the main fireplace to wait for Charlie.

"It is a pity that you shall be leaving so soon. I do wish that whatever has troubled you will end up with a good conclusion." Lucius looked down at Harry with guarded eyes. Harry inclined his head as acceptance that the elder Slytherin had forgiven him as well.

They were saved from further communication as Charlie flooded into the manor. He gave Harry a look of concern and lifted up the boy's suitcase. Harry gave him a look which silenced the redhead. Instead Charlie smiled and said, "Shall we go. I'm afraid that I'm needed with the dragons. We'll be flooding there since you have already been keyed into the wards."

"Won't the dragons smell our scent like with Apparation?" Harry questioned.

Charlie shook his head. "We've cast blocking wards around a cottage which the fireplace is in. When we step out of the house the dragons will not be as incensed because our scents will seep through the wards as we open the door. They are intelligent creatures and will know who is friend and who is foe. That way they won't be too startled by our sudden smells."

Harry accepted this because he did indeed know that the dragons were smart. They had on countless occasions proven that they knew what was going on in their surroundings. He took a pinch of floo powder and threw it into the fireplace. Charlie stepped in with him and clearly said, "Dragon Facility." The fire roared as they were swept off through the grate. An inaudible sigh of relief escaped Harry's lips.

True to Charlie's word, the dragons did not seem very shocked when Harry and Charlie stepped out of an old wood worn cottage. Outwardly Harry appeared calm and collected while inwardly his mind was a raging storm of emotions. He had to do something to get his mind off of current events. The anger had to simmer down before he could assess the situation clearly enough.

"May I go and find a job?" Harry asked his summer guardian.

Charlie raised his brows. "I don't think that's a good idea. Preferably I'd like you to go back to my house and relax for a bit. Something went wrong while you were at the Malfoys. I won't pry it out of you but I think it would be better for you to take the day off. You can return to work tomorrow."

"I'd feel better doing something productive then lazing around inside." Harry looked at the redhead with pleading eyes.

"No." Charlie adamantly refused. "You can take a walk instead. If I hear you've had a single job today I'll ground you."

Harry looked appalled. "You can't do that."

"Are you willing to make a bet on that?" Charlie asked with a wicked glint in his eyes.

Harry decided to take the safe way out and shook his head. "I have nothing to bet and gambling is frivolous and simply idiotic. I have no time to waste on such mediocre things."

He has definitely been spending too much time around Snape, Charlie thought with amusement.

Harry left the Weasley and proceeded to walk down the cottages towards the forest. He would not go into it but instead walk along the edge. Ever the Slytherin, Harry had decided not to go in unless he was with someone who could do spells without alerting the ministry. His life came first and no stupid sense of adventure was going to have him going into a forest unprotected.

And so the boy walked unhurriedly along the perimeter of the Facility. His anger was slowly dissipating. His anger at Draco remained but the fury that welled up was no longer worrying. Harry could *almost* think clearly enough to go back and review his argument with the blond.

Today just didn't seem like his day and so once again Harry took the effortless way out. He simply chose not to think about it anymore. Emerald green eyes regarded the forest with awe. It was beautiful in a dark sense. In a way it was similar to the one at Hogwarts, the forbidden forest. From within the darkness Harry could hear the scuttling of small animals and strangely a voice. It hissed and spat nonsense but it became obvious that the owner of such a voice was a snake or a parselmouth. The latter was unlikely so Harry decided on the former to be the correct assumption.

:Hello: He hissed out carefully.

The snake stopped its ramblings and slithered towards Harry. Said boy took a step back as a black asp about four feet long slithered out of the forest. It gave Harry a most peculiar look which in itself was odd enough having come from a snake.

:A snake speaker. How odd, how interesting.: The asp's tongue flickered out as it tasted the air around it. :Young you are.:

:Tell me speaker what corrupts your mind and soils your innocence:

Harry was taken aback by the blunt question. It was too blunt however and Harry could not determine what it meant. There were many answers and the boy did not want to reveal more than what was asked if at all. :What do you speak of aspis?"

:Your air is tarnished and stricken with lashes. Someone has hurt you deeper than blood.: The asp had now slithered along Harry's leg and was slowly making its way up his body.

:Those who sired me have done this.: Harry found himself shocked at the honesty behind those words. Why was he telling this snake his words? Was it because of his anger and need to rant? Or perhaps this snake had magical properties.

A hissing laugh was emitted from the serpent. : It is not I who makes you speak. Do not blame those who do not sow.:

Harry was confused at the last sentence. What did the snake mean now? Its strange way of talking and the little riddles it spoke did little to ease Harry's built up rage.

:Release it young one.: The asp offered unnecessarily. It had now made its way up to his shoulders. Harry watched in amazement as the snake resized itself to only a quarter of its previous length.

:How did you do that: Harry asked still wide-eyed. From what he had read no snake could change shape at will.

:Unfortunate but honest you cannot know until I tell you. The one who made me died at my bite. From his core he spelled me this way. From his vial he fed me blood of a shape shifter. From them I have been able to change my length and the colour of my scales.:

:Is that why you chose to remain in this forest: Harry tentatively stroked the scales of the foot long snake.

:Why yes, I do believe that it is why I stayed. Too long ago I came and from there I have known nothing else.:

Harry had heard only three other snakes speak and none of them had spoken in such a way. Something was different about this snake. It could have been that it was unused to speaking or that it was not completely sane. Either way nothing mattered because with its permission Harry hoped to keep the snake as a familiar. Such a peculiar beauty should not have to hide from dragons and hunt daily to keep from starving.

:Will you come with me? Do you know of familiars: Harry asked lifting the snake to stare it in the eye.

Its sharp onyx eyes met his calmly. :Your shoulder shall be warm for quite a while.:

Harry chuckled and placed the snake back on his shoulder. :Do you have a name:

:Enigma seems intelligent.: The snake supplied.

:It seems rather boorish to me.: Harry narrowed his eyes in thought. :How about Aeni? It comes from the word aenigma. In Latin it means enigma.:

:A compromise speaker, how daring. I accept for the reason it remains alike.:

:Call me Harry, it is only fair.: Harry gently set Aeni on his shoulder and set off towards Charlie's cottage. He wanted to speak with his familiar and standing outside in plain view was far from inconspicuous.

:I will call you what comes to mind.: Aeni hissed with amusement.

:An enigma you are.: The unleashed anger had completely gone by now and Harry felt tremendously better. Choosing Aeni for his familiar was proving to be a smart decision already.

Chapter 4

Visitors

Harry lowered Aeni on his bed and gave the snake an almost piercing look. : Do you remember any family or habitat before you were changed: Harry was listening attentively now.

: I was bred in the womb.: She responded airily.

Harry successfully kept a scowl off of his face. :Were you born in captivity: he asked instead.

: My first image was of the maker and his last view was of me.: Aeni's voice was smug and she hissed nonsensically. It took Harry a moment to realize that she was laughing.

A sadistic snake, how charming.

Harry guessed that by maker she meant the man who had changed her. Speaking of other humans, he would have to keep Aeni a secret. : I will have to keep you hidden.: Harry hissed softly. : My humans know nothing of my ability.:

: You hide?" Aeni spat angrily. : How dare you hide my noble tongue.?

: It is not so gracious to the other humans. The snake lings understand but the others will claim me evil and have already cursed your name: Harry soothing caressed Aeni's scales.

: I will bite them all. Foolish humans you are. Blood will be spilt!

Harry fought back the laughter that wished to bubble forth. It would only agitate the snake ever further. Instead Harry chose to try and negotiate with her. :Aeni, you cannot murder humans. They would destroy you, cut your flesh, use your blood and scales in potions then feed you to the Hippogriffs.: *That ought to do it*, Harry thought.

Aeni snapped forwards and bit an invisible opponent. : Blood be theirs, if spilt.:

Harry smiled. : Do you have any other traits:

Aeni glared balefully. : Am I not enough the way you see me:

: You are beautiful. I was simply curious.: Harry said honestly.

: Very well. I can sense the air magic.: She said abruptly stopped speaking and coiled up only to fall asleep.

Harry guessed that she had no other powers. Nevertheless he enjoyed her presence and swore to take care of the mental snake.

With no Aeni to talk to, Harry's thoughts went back to Draco. Draco had hurt him badly and Harry would in no way apologize just to be friends with someone who used him. Thinking back Harry could admit that he too had been rash and rude. But the thought of apologizing disappeared almost completely.

His insecurities had only gotten worse from what he had heard. Perhaps Draco would only accept his request for forgiveness only to use Harry once again. The only way this argument would be solved was if Draco said sorry first. Their friendship rested in the blond's hands. If those words meant nothing and were spoken in an act of defense then Draco would have to tell Harry that. The lack of trust Harry had did nothing to make that easier either. And when the brunet really stopped and thought it appeared that both boys had screwed up royally.

There was only one week left before school would start. Harry was nervous yet excited. On one hand going back would mean having to face Draco Malfoy, on the other hand he would also get to see Blaise and Theodore.

Harry could not think about his friends at the moment. He had to prepare for the ministry worker. It may have been near the end of Harry's stay, but the ministry had at last sent a worker to check on him. This concluded, after a long argument, that Harry would have to do all the dirty work at the Facility until the official left, which could have been all day.

Harry groaned when Charlie pointed towards a first aid pile. There were dozens of gauze lengths to be rolled and syringes which needed to be labeled according to the size of the dragon. And lastly in that disgustingly large pile there were ointments which needed to be sorted. Grimacing, Harry grudgingly went to work. Despite the tedious load he was still being paid which made it seem not quite as bad. This was one of the reasons why Harry assiduously kept working.

And it was a good thing too because Charlie had left Lucas in charge of supervising Harry. Then he had left to go collect the ministry official who would be waiting at the Romanian train station.

Charlie had lowered the wards so that the two could arrive faster. The wards were still partially up so Charlie would have to bring the official through the floo. All in all the Weasley had predicted that they would arrive by noon.

Lucas had taken to taunting Harry in his own way during the time in between. The black haired wizard lounged on the ground, supported by a cushioning charm, drinking a large glass of pumpkin juice while reading a novel.

Like any good Slytherin, Harry kept his nasty comments back. The official could arrive early and discover that Harry was not truly being disciplined. Or Lucas himself could add additional work to his tedious heap. Neither of these consequences seemed very agreeable for a mere insult.

Harry had been working for a steady two hours when the sound of voices reached his ears. One was Charlie's easy tone and the other sounded familiar. Harry had heard it before but could not place the owner. A pair of grey eyes flashed in his mind.

Harry swiveled around sharply and nearly shrank in fear when he saw none other than Sirius Black.

Draco smiled slightly when he saw Severus enter the room. Ever since he had his fight with Harry, he had felt miserable. Severus happened to have seen the change in Draco. He asked Draco to accompany him to his room. The blond boy did as he was told. When Severus would ask about Harry he would be angry at the result. It was best if his Professor raged behind closed doors. Draco had yet to tell his mother and father about what had occurred.

Severus took a seat and looked at Draco expectantly. "Where is Harry?"

Draco lowered his molten silver eyes and collapsed gracefully on a chair. "We had an argument and Harry went back to the Dragon Facility."

A dark eyebrow lifted. "And what could have made Harry leave so unexpectedly. That boy is far from discourteous."

"Some unnecessary things were said, Sev." Draco looked even worse. With a deep breath he told Severus everything that had happened. Conveniently, Draco left out the bit about the diary.

Severus was pinching the bridge of his nose by the time his student was done. His obsidian gaze glared at Draco. "You have been taught better, Draco. This is a perfect example as to why you must control yourself!" he snapped. "It is not entirely your blunder however. Harry is to fault as well."

Severus stood and made his way to the fireplace. He turned and sternly looked at Draco. "If your comradeship means anything significant, then reconcile with Harry." Before the boy could speak, his Professor was gone in a burst of green flame.

Merlin, have mercy on me, Harry thought with trepidation. After all, this man *had* been his godfather and was the best friend of James Potter. Who knew what Sirius had planned or even if he remembered Harry.

Flashback

Harry tentatively looked through the bars of the staircase and peeked at the visitors. They were Mr. Lupin and Mr. Black, his godfather. Harry shrank back as they passed the staircase in fear of being caught. Daddy had told him to stay upstairs.

Unfortunately, Remus caught the movement from the corner of his eye. In a flash he had Harry pinned by the curious amber stare.

...

End Flashback

Harry shivered faintly when his memory assaulted him. That had been the last time he had seen either Remus or Sirius properly. Remus seemed to have disappeared whenever Harry was around and he had only caught quick glances of Sirius. When Harry had asked Lily where the werewolf was, she had told him that he visited occasionally and didn't want to see Harry at all. This had made the little boy upset and angry at the gentle wizard. First he had forgotten him, and then he had flat out refused to see him. What had Harry done to deserve such treatment from the man who had once cared?

Sirius grinned at Charlie; he was rather annoyed at having to come all the way to Romania to check up on some punk kid. His mood had gotten increasingly better as he spoke to Charlie.

"He's been doing what we ask for the most part. He's a quiet bloke. I don't honestly know why James wanted him here." Charlie put on a confused expression.

“Jamesie boy can’t control his temper. He never did tell me who the kid is, said something about disrespect though. I’ll have to see for myself if he’s worth reporting,” Sirius assured.

“Here we are.” Charlie stepped into an empty dry lot behind the infirmary.

Sirius looked away from Charlie and fixed his grey eyes on the boy sitting amongst a huge pile of tangled gauze. The boy looked up and Sirius found himself transfixed by the brilliant emerald eyes. He knew this kid but from where?

Sirius thought back and dug through his older memories. At last he came to a memory of a toddler. Sirius could easily tell that the child in his memory was the same as the boy in front of him.

Flashback

...

*Sirius saw the lack of movement in his friend as they entered the Potter manor. He saw that Remus was looking kindly at a small boy hidden by the stairs. Sirius too stared at the small boy. His messy black hair and vibrant green eyes made him look beyond adorable. It was hard not to stare. But who was this boy? He looked nothing like Jamie so he couldn’t possibly be her twin; Harry. **He must be one of her neighborhood friends**, Sirius thought pleasantly.*

“Hello. Who are you?” Sirius asked in a soft tone as to not scare the shy child.

By now the boy had backed up against the wall and turned his head away from the two. The boy had assumed Remus had spoken on account of the gentle whisper of the voice. Tears slipped past his eyes and he began to cry. Remus did not remember him.

Remus meanwhile was glaring at Sirius. How could he not realize that this boy was? Before Remus could console the boy, James entered the hall. His eyes flashed when he saw the petit child.

“What did I say about coming down?” James asked sternly.

"That I shouldn't, sir," a soft almost fearful voice answered.

*"Well go on then." James turned apologetic eyes on his friends.
"Sorry about that. He's grounded for hitting Jamie."*

Sirius was confused. Did this mean that the boy really was Harry? A wave of guilt hit him sharply. He was too busy feeling guilty he did not even realize how distraught Harry had become.

Remus however could see the tears on Harry's face. He moved to comfort the boy but he had already run up the stairs.

"James, I'm going to go talk to Harry." Remus began climbing up the steps.

"Shit," Sirius muttered. His thoughts were just confirmed. "How come I didn't notice him?" he asked stupidly.

The werewolf rolled his eyes at Sirius. "Had you actually paid attention to him you might have realized that Harry seems to be the exact opposite of Jamie. Now if you don't mind, I am going to see if the poor boy is all right."

"What for?" Sirius asked. "He's grounded for hitting Jamie. If anyone needs comfort it's Jamie."

Remus couldn't help but glare at his best friend. "How do you think he feels Sirius? His own godfather forgot about him. I know we don't get to visit much but you should be ashamed of yourself Sirius!"

Before Remus could take another step up the stairs, James blocked him. "Let him be Remus. Harry doesn't like people much. He'll feel better soon. C'mon, Jamie and Lily have been waiting all week to see you."

Remus tried to move around James but the man forcefully pushed him back. "From the way you're acting Moony, I would think you see me as a bad father."

"If neglecting one of your children classifies as you being a bad parent then yes!" Remus snapped, his anger getting the best of him.

James froze, as did Sirius who had stepped between them. "You don't mean that Moony," James said frowning.

"So long as you treat Harry this way then yes, I do mean what I said." Remus was scowling at the Potter patriarch.

"Get out," James snarled.

Sirius made a sound of protest. "James, be reasonable."

"Are you saying you agree with him?" Hazel eyes glittered accusingly.

"No! Remus just doesn't know what he's saying. He's being unreasonable. You should both calm down, knock back a bit of Ogden's and talk this out."

Before any of them could blink, Remus trapped Sirius to the wall. "I know exactly what I'm saying, Black. Don't presume you know what my thoughts are. I am disgusted with you and your lack of concern for your own godson." He dropped the shell-shocked animagus.

"Goodbye James. I honestly hope Harry finds a better family than you. I would take him myself if the ministry allowed it. One day, I might even be able to explain my actions to him. And one day, he might forgive me." Remus spun on his heel and stormed out of the Potter manor.

Sirius and James stared at the door in disbelief. They hadn't expected him to actually leave. Remus was usually the docile one, he never argued for long and almost always submitted to James' and Sirius' will. What had changed?

End Flashback

"Harry," Sirius choked out.

To be honest the handsome man hadn't given much thought to Harry after that night. He had mourned the loss of Remus' friendship and had kept his opinions about Harry to himself should he have had any. His friendship with James wasn't work jeopardizing for a child he barely knew. He had felt a bit of relief when James had disowned him.

It was selfish of him but he hasn't ever regretted his decision. Sirius thought that this might be because he had for the most part forgotten Harry altogether.

"Auror Black." Harry nodded slightly his face emotionless.

Sirius winced inwardly. His former godson obviously remembered him. "I can see you have been working as told. If you will excuse me, I just have to speak with your supervisors."

Lucas and Charlie followed Sirius into the infirmary. Tyler pointed towards his office when he saw the men. The trio entered the office and erected silencing charms.

"Why didn't you tell me it was Harry?" Sirius demanded. "I can't talk to the boy!"

Lucas narrowed his eyes, "Why ever not, Black?"

"It's...complicated. Look I'll just tell them Harry's been doing everything that he's told and leave now. Okay? We all win that way? I doubt he's going to talk to me anyway." Sirius sighed heavily and leaned against Tyler's desk.

"So much for Gryffindor courage," Lucas smirked.

"Luc, not now," Charlie warned. "Don't say anything negative about Harry and tell them he's doing as he is told and we'll let you off. If James asks about him tell him nothing other than he looked slightly overworked and angry."

"Deal." Sirius shook Charlie's hand and Lucas' after some deliberation. "Good day Mr. Khomen."

Charlie and Sirius left once again while Lucas went back out to check on Harry. The Slytherin boy was sitting amongst the gauze staring out at nothing in particular.

"Harry? You all right, lad?" Lucas inquired softly, swishing his wand. The gauze separated itself and rolled up into tight little neat rolls.

Harry looked up at Lucas and smiled slightly. "Thanks, Lucas."

"No problem, little man. Let's go get some lunch, I'm starving." Harry chuckled but got up anyways. He would have to try and sneak some food back for Aeni.

The visit from Sirius had brought back bad memories and a wave of shock. Harry was not really hurt by the illegal animagus' presence. He had gotten over Sirius at a very young age. Godfather or not, that man had been a prick. His visit had only disturbed Harry really. There weren't many conflicting feelings going around in his mind. When Sirius had forgotten him with Remus, he had lost all chances to redeem himself in Harry's eyes.

Lucas dismissed Harry from his errands for the afternoon. During this time, Harry had talked further with Aeni and had read his course books. Although they were written by Gilderoy Lockhart they still had valuable information in them. Lockhart may be a fake, but the events in the books were rather realistic. The witches or wizards that had actually done these tasks knew what they were doing.

Harry was impressed at how Lockhart had managed to capture every detail and still make it seem absolutely amazing. He may not have been talented magic wise but he sure had the talent to be a writer. The other information in the books was simply *stupid*. Lockhart had deemed it necessary put in random pieces of information that no one needed to know. Harry could care less what the idiot's favourite colour was.

: A human is approaching.: Aeni warned as she slid under Harry's bedspread.

Harry looked up just as Charlie entered. He was wearing a grin which surprisingly did not seem faux. "Bill and his team are coming over tomorrow, to tune the wards again. It's a standard procedure. Are you up to meeting more adults?" Charlie asked flopping down next to Harry.

Said boy's eyes glittered in amusement. Charlie really could act like a kid sometimes. "I don't particularly mind. I hope you realize I won't act the same way around them that I do you."

Charlie threw an arm over his shoulders and pulled the boy into a rough hug. "I didn't expect you to. You Slytherins don't go anywhere without a mask. I just wanted to warn you. Bill and his team are cool; they're nice and not overly questioning. They're going to be here for the entire day probably. The wards take time to tune and recharge."

Harry smiled and watched Charlie from the corner of his eye. "Thanks Charlie."

The fourth eldest Weasley said nothing but grinned crookedly. They both knew it wasn't just the warning that Harry was thankful for. They sat back in a companionable silence and suddenly Draco's irritation didn't seem so bad anymore. Harry would always have other friends if the blond decided to relinquish their friendship.

"Bill," Charlie called out beckoning his brother over to him.

Harry hadn't seen Bill much but one look at him had Harry in surprise. To sum up Bill in one word would be; *cool*. He wore black dueling robes with thick leather boots underneath. His long red hair was tied loosely revealing a sharp looking fang earring. The rest of his team consisted of two people who wore the same black dueling robes. They too were dressed like muggle rockers. The female had red hair as well, but hers was considerably darker than Bill's. The other male had neatly combed back brown hair and looked rather impatient.

The two other team members did not stick around to introduced themselves but left with Lucas. According to Charlie they had gone to see the warding and would report back to Bill with the results.

"How are you?" Bill asked hugging Charlie.

“Just fine. Nothing spectacular has really happened except getting Harry here.”

Harry watched them with a blank face. When Bill nodded to him, he inclined his head in greeting. He was silent for the most part but the eldest Weasley sibling seemed to acknowledge that they barely knew each other.

“Would you like to see how the warding is done?” Bill asked.

For the first time since he arrived Harry spoke. “I would love to. Could you tell me more about the warding?”

Bill like Charlie was in his element as he explained the complications of warding and the curses they had to check for before placing them up. Harry was lost in the words and only managed to understand some of the process. Everything else washed away in the confusion. By the end of the long winded explanation Harry was stunned.

Bill laughed outright when he saw the expression. “I’d be stunned if you actually understood everything the first time. If you’re interested then read *The Standard Book of Wards* by Miranda Goshawk.” Harry made a mental note to read it in his spare time.

“I think the practical experience would be easier to understand,” Charlie supplied. “I know the Dragon Facility wards and from experience, I can tell you that it’s much easier to watch Bill and his team work instead of listening.”

“Charlie here was hopeless the first time around.” Bill laughed at his brother’s expense and led them to the working area.

The other two had constructed a detailed chart and were examining it carefully. They nodded to Charlie and Harry but went back to work.

“Don’t mind them,” Bill whispered to Harry. “They aren’t too keen on dragons.”

Harry smiled slightly. For the rest of the day he watched as they took down old wards and replaced them with new ones. The colorful beams omitting from their wands flew around the area giving off the

appearance of fireworks. Harry was awed by the intricate webs of spells that lined the atmosphere when they were done. Bill and his team snapped their wands towards the web and in unison exclaimed a spell. The web of lights faded into the air leaving the Facility looking relatively normal.

It was nightfall by then and the curse breakers had to leave. Bill hugged Charlie and shook Harry's hand. He bid them farewell and left with his relieved team.

By the time the duo had retired to Charlie's cottage, Harry had decided one something. He liked Bill Weasley.

Charlie resized Harry's trunk and placed a quick lightening charm on it. Harry shook the redhead's head and bade him goodbye before hurrying onto the train. The young Slytherin walked towards the back of the train. After searching a few compartments Harry came upon Blaise and Theodore's.

"Harry!" Blaise smiled enthusiastically. "You can help me prove that we're ready to start the animagus transformations. Theo says it's too early."

Theodore smirked. "Hello Harry. How was your summer?"

Harry grinned back at his friend and stowed his trunk away. He sat down next to Theo and told him how his summer went. Blaise listened alertly but did not forget about his thoughts on the animagus training. Once Harry was done, Blaise asked him once again.

Unfortunately, he was disappointed with the answer. "Actually Blaise, Theo's right. It's too early and our bodies haven't matured much. We've read as much as we could about the transformations and I think the earliest we can start to actually try is next year. That would mean by fourth year we would have mastered our meditations and could actually start the changing process. We can't actually do anything for it now. But...we still have other projects to work on."

Theo's brown eyes caught Harry's green. "We have to get the ministry's tracking devices off of our wands."

Harry nodded sharply. Blaise looked dejected. "I completely forgot about that." His eyes lit up and he gave Harry a quizzical stare. "That also reminds me of something else. Why didn't you write back to us? We sent you messages via journal."

Harry blushed slightly. "I gave my journal to Draco before I went in to face Voldemort. He still has it I think. So many things happened afterwards and I just forgot about getting it back." Their compartment door opened to reveal Draco Malfoy. "Well that's convenient," Blaise muttered earning an amused smile from Theo.

Neither Harry nor Draco noticed this as they were trying to not look at each other. Draco sighed indistinctly. He sat down next to Harry and almost hesitantly tugged his earlobe. Harry's eyes snapped up to meet Draco's grey ones in shock.

"I'm sorry," whispered the blond.

Harry looked into his eyes and saw honesty. "I apologize as well. What I asked was uncalled for. Let's talk about this later." Draco smiled widely and lightly embraced Harry.

"Here." Draco pulled out Harry's journal from the folds of his robes. "I haven't opened it," he swore.

"I trust you." Draco's grin got wider if even possible.

Harry stood up and gathered a large parcel from his trunk. Draco, Blaise and Theo eyed it with curiosity. Harry placed it in Draco's lap. "I got it for your birthday, it's a bit late. I wanted to give it to you before, but well..." Harry trailed off uncertainly.

Draco opened the parcel and beamed. "Thank you, Harry. It's perfect and it'll go into good use this year."

It was Harry's turn to be bewildered. When he tried asking Draco what he meant, the blond simply shook off his questions. Theo and Blaise however were still lost. They had no idea whatsoever of what

Harry and Draco were making up about. Whatever the issue was they had not been told so it probably was not for them to know. If either of their friends decided to tell them then they would listen. Being Slytherin, Blaise and Theodore knew when not to pry.

The quartet was disturbed from their conversations when the door flew open to reveal Ron and Hermione along with another girl. From the looks of it, the girl was a first year and a Weasley. Draco sneered at them while the rest of the boys simply glared.

"Is there a particular reason why you have chosen to disrupt us?" Theodore asked calmly fingering his wand.

"Let's go Hermione, Jamie's obviously not here," Ron growled gripping his own wand tightly.

"And why would you search for the girl-who-lived in the snake's section of the train?" Blaise asked with a polite, mocking tone.

"The train does not belong to anyone so therefore the Slytherins cannot claim the back of the train," Hermione snapped.

"We don't need to own it for it to *belong* to us," Theodore retorted in Blaise's defense.

While they argued, the redheaded girl who had hidden behind Ron had moved forth and into view. She stared at Harry with an odd sparkle in her eyes. It unnerved Harry quite a bit. He vaguely remembered the girl always trying to follow him around when they were little. She had never gotten over the fact that Harry despised her clingy attitude. She ostensibly never realized that Harry did not return her affections. He never did remember her name.

Draco had caught sight of her as well. "What's this, *another* Weasley? How tragic."

Ron moved to curse Draco but ever sensible Hermione stopped him. "Let's just go Ron; these *people* don't deserve our time. Jamie might be up in the front or her parents could have taken her up to Hogwarts already."

Ron huffed but nodded jerkily. "C'mon, Ginny."

The trio left the area thankfully and the Slytherins found themselves at ease. Gryffindors always awakened a sense of paranoia around them.

Blaise broke the silence with a casual remark. "Hey Harry, I think that Weasley girl feels something entirely different than hate for you." His teasing tone had Draco and Theodore both glaring.

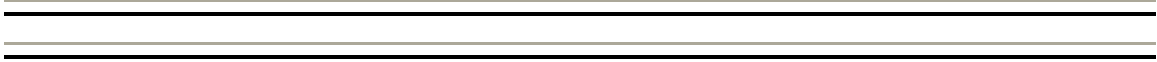
Purebloods of all people knew how far infatuations could go. Crushes, lovers and relationships in general were never to be taken lightly. Blaise's mother was a perfect example of that. She had married seven times and each of her wealthy husbands had died mysteriously. Blaise of course knew all about his mother's exploits and had hated them when he had learned of them. But then she had married Niro Zabini. This wizard was the one who had captured his mother's heart and had in return given her his own. It was a romantic tale which began with a plot to murder Niro.

Blaise never truly understood his parent's relationship all that well. He was after all only twelve years old. The Italian boy did not care to understand so long as his father and mother managed to stay alive and together. He loved them both very much and they in return loved him. Matia had succumbed to being an actual wife when she married Niro. She had forgone the contraceptive charms and had created Blaise in the process. He was the first and only child she had ever had and he had been made of love.

Matia had found out that her chances of having more children were slim to none. She had then vowed to spend her time protecting Blaise as much as she could. Niro had supported her in that statement for he too was afraid of losing his only child and heir. Sometimes Blaise felt loved that his parents took such good care of him. At other times, the overprotective parents got annoying. Blaise dealt with it and couldn't find himself happier. He would take his parents any day than no parents at all.

While Blaise was having his reflection period, the others were changing into their robes. They were soon approaching Hogwarts and Slytherins did tend to look their best. First impressions were

everything and the first years were getting sorted that day. Blaise snapped out of his thoughts and gathered his robes as well. The four boys spent the rest of the ride speaking lowly of what the year might bring them.



Chapter 5

Adieu for Now

"I suppose we shouldn't be surprised that it is once again raining," Theodore said distastefully.

Blaise pulled out his wand and placed a water-repelling charm over himself. "Well, it's a good thing Adrian made us learn these charms then."

The other brandished their wands and placed the charms upon themselves as well. Draco and Blaise childishly looked around for Potter. She probably did not know the charms. Sure enough, within a matter of seconds they spotted her and couldn't help but scowl petulantly. Granger had obviously learnt the charms and performed them for her *friends*.

Theo and Harry shared a look of amusement. Draco and Blaise as hard as they tried could not stop themselves from giving into childlike irritability. It was almost refreshing after spending a long day with a cold face. At the moment Harry and Theo had their façade of indifference on. Theo noticed a few of the older Slytherins looking at Blaise and Draco in distaste.

However amusing they might be to Harry and Theodore, the older years did not care. Slytherins had an image to maintain and right now, two of them were breaking the unwritten code. Theo quickly nudged his friends. Draco's face cleared of all emotion immediately while Blaise took his time to look sheepish before schooling his features into a pretense of boredom.

Hurriedly, they walked down the trail towards the carriages. The four boys were curious as to why the carriages had no horses. They did not ponder the thought long as they quickly claimed an empty carriage to themselves. The horseless carriages could wait, there were far more important things that needed contemplation.

“Welcome to another year at Hogwarts!” Dumbledore announced, once everyone had gone silent. “As for our older students, hopefully you shall have retained some knowledge of what you have learned here from the previous year. All of you will be responsible for setting a delightful example for the newest students entering your house. Welcome them with open arms, embrace their talents and gifts despite what they might be and keep a handy pouch of sweets for emergencies. Let the sorting begin!”

Professor McGonagall unrolled a stiff roll of parchment. She peered at the first years over the bridge of her glasses. “When I call your name, you shall come forward and try on the sorting hat.”

The first years shifted nervously and avoided the eyes of the older years in fear of being rejected. McGonagall cleared her throat. All eyes went upon her strict form. Harry tuned out the ceremony and listened only half-heartedly. He caught a few names as they were sorted.

“Creevey, Colin.”

“GRYFFINDOR!”

“Harper, Sebastian.”

“SLYTHERIN!”

Lazily, Harry clapped along with the other members of his house but otherwise ignored the boy.

“Lovegood, Luna.”

“RAVENCLAW!”

Harry’s interest was caught for a moment as he watched the absentminded blonde girl glide up to the sorting hat. Her straggly, waist-length, dirty blonde hair and protuberant eyes did nothing for

her appearance. She was average in the beauty department but her dreamy air attracted Harry slightly. He nearly smiled when he caught sight of her wand. It was positioned ever so strategically behind her ear, easy enough to grasp and use within minimal seconds.

Draco saw Harry looking at the girl and sneered scornfully. The girl was nothing special. She looked to be a loner and a basket case. The blond boy dismissed her easily, that is until he caught the interest in his best friend's eyes. A spark of jealousy flared within him but passed quickly. Harry was his friend and would remain so. Lovegood didn't have a chance. He bit back a smile of satisfaction and smirked as the youngest Weasley child anxiously put on the sorting hat.

"Weasley, Ginevra."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

"I wonder what the point of sorting the Weasleys is?" Blaise murmured, bored yet honest. The Slytherins around him looked at him with amusement.

The rest of the welcome feast passed by normally and before they knew it, it was time to head back to their dormitories.

Blaise, Theodore, Draco and Harry entered the familiar common room with cheerful spirits. They had truly missed Hogwarts. The quartet took in the leather armchairs, the roaring fireplaces, the several chess tables and the empty walls. Long ago, before the school had even begun, Salazar had charmed the walls so that no portrait could be hung on them.

Having a portrait could easily give others access to one's secrets. In this case, any portrait in the room could have given Dumbledore information of what went on in the snake's den. The Slytherins were more than thankful for this. It was one of the reasons why they got away with far more than the headmaster knew.

Draco bid Blaise and Theo goodnight before lightly pushing Harry towards their room. The smaller boy nodded to his friends and quickly went after Draco. He entered the room and smiled slightly. No one

besides Draco was here to see his emotion. For the moment, Harry didn't care who saw his joy at being back.

"Harry." Draco's customary drawl lured the boy to his bed.

"Draco." Harry's smile vanished and left him entirely serious.

"Let me start. It will be easier if I tell you everything now while I still have the courage," Draco stated.

Harry nodded and lay back against the pillows. Draco followed his movement and stretched out beside him.

"Lemon drop?" Dumbledore held out a small pouch of the tangy sweet.

James and Lily shook their heads impatiently but remained quiet. They had been summoned to Dumbledore's office for a private meeting with the headmaster. The two had been curious as to why they had been called to the school. From the events of the last time they were there, the Potter elders had not been on such good terms with Dumbledore. So with spiked curiosity, James and Lily had arrived on time and waited patiently for whatever news Dumbledore had to give them.

"Why have you called up here, Albus?" inquired Lily. Her soft voice echoed in the office.

Dumbledore sighed and entwined his spindly fingers. "It is time you began Jamie's training. Your daughter should also be informed of the entire contents of the prophecy. Due to the events of last year, it is only fitting that she know of her destiny. I believe Voldemort will rise once again. He is far from deceased and will not stop his ways until he has all power over the wizarding world. Jamie must know that he will return. She will need to accept the truth and learn to overcome what the future holds for her. The prophecy is accurate and according

to its gist, your daughter will be the only one who can defeat Voldemort.

James frowned deeply and gripped the arms of his chair. Lily buried her head in her hands and fought not to cry. For the past few years they had avoided telling Jamie the whole prophecy. She only knew that she had defeated Voldemort and that he *might* come back. The Potters had thought that Voldemort was truly gone, forever. Now they would have to tell their daughter that he was going to return for sure. Jamie was not completely stupid either. She would figure out what was happening sooner rather than later, especially since she had befriended that Granger girl.

“Lily, you must bring up her knowledge of the wizarding world. She does not try to excel in her classes which reflects on her grades. It would be prudent if you hired a tutor or taught the girl yourself. Spend what time you have with Jamie, studying and teaching. The world needs a savior and at the moment Jamie Potter is far from the leader we need. Witches and wizards will respect you all much more if your daughter exceeded the curriculum and outclassed her fellow peers. Will you do as I ask?”

It was not a request no matter how Dumbledore phrased it. James and Lily had no choice in the matter. Not only was it the best form of action but it was also what Albus Dumbledore suggested, which meant it had to be for the best. Didn't it?

James nodded stiffly. “Very well, Albus.” He reached out and took Lily's hand. She was afraid of losing her baby and James could only do so much as to comfort her.

“Excellent, my boy! Soon in the future, I too shall teach Jamie the fine art of magic.” His voice faded into a low murmur which neither James nor Lily could hear.

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes were glazed and far off. He seemed to have forgotten anyone else was in the office with him at all. Silently, James stood and pulled Lily from her own chair. They left through the floo, not at all bemused about the headmaster's oddness.

“I want you to know, that everything I said when we fought was a lie. I never meant any of it and I spoke out of anger. You have every right to keep secrets and I shouldn’t have spoken so harshly about your privacy. I was just so furious. You are my best friend, Harry but there are so many times where I don’t even know you. Blanks appear easily when I think of you. You’ve told me practically nothing of your past except for a few details. You hide the reason why you wake up from constant nightmares.”

At Harry’s shocked look, Draco scowled. “I know about the nightmares. You may have silencing charms on yourself but that doesn’t mean you have them on the bed. I know you take dreamless sleep sometimes. I know that you take pain relieving potions as well.”

“You looked in my trunk?” Harry asked dangerously.

Draco scoffed. “Of course not. I thought you trusted me?” Harry blushed slightly. “Before the holidays you left two empty vials on your bed accidentally. I simply read the labels,” Draco admitted.

Harry smiled apologetically. Draco let out a sigh. “Let me in, Harry. I want to help you, and I want to be your friend. I can’t do that if you’re hiding away like a hermit in the open. You’re there but no matter what we do, we...I can’t get you to come out of your shell.”

Draco turned on his side and faced Harry solemnly. “Got it?”

Harry nodded and rolled onto his side so that he and Draco were lying down face to face. “Yeah. I get it.”

Draco grinned. “Good. Now what’s your explanation?”

“I was scared. And I was insecure.” Harry bit his lip.

Draco was stunned. “That’s it?” His grey eyes widened as Harry nodded. “You mean we ignored each other for a whole month because you were too scared to tell me you were insecure?”

Harry nodded, embarrassed. He didn't want Draco to laugh, it was hard enough to tell him already. And Merlin damn it, it hurt to admit that!

Draco threw an arm over Harry's waist and smiled fondly at the smaller boy. "You stupid prat. Don't ever feel that way about our friendship. I wouldn't force myself to be friends with anyone because I had to. I am a Malfoy after all. We don't need to do anything."

Harry smirked at the pure arrogance his friend emitted. "Shut up, Draco. Even Malfoys need to do things every once in a while."

"Don't ruin my theory," Draco snapped playfully. "I am serious though. If you feel like that again, just talk to me. I like you, and you are my friend. You are Harry, Draco's friend. There is nothing complicated about it! I swear to Merlin, Harry. If you ever accuse me of taking you in as a charity case again, I'll set Blaise on you and remind him you haven't heard of the time he ate bad shellfish."

Harry let loose the laughter that had been threatening to erupt. Draco grinned at the laughing boy and pulled him further into his embrace. Harry calmed his laughter and subconsciously rested his head on Draco's shoulder. They drifted off to sleep in their position, not caring that they were still in their school robes or that they still had on their shoes.

Knobby restrained himself from glaring at the house elf in front of him. He was a disgrace to all house elves, a traitor to his family and an ungrateful servant of the Malfoy family.

"What is you doing, Dobby?" asked Knobby in exasperation. "You is not to leave your master's manor. If Malfoy master find outs you is getting lashes!"

Dobby, who had been bound to a chair by house elf magic, shrank back in fear. But the elf did not speak.

“What is you doing at Potter manor?” Knobby repeated.

Although Knobby was now employed at Hogwarts, he was still bound to the Potter family. He was still their head elf and worked at the Potter manor during the summers. All major questions, decisions and intruders were sent straight to Knobby. Dobby, who had been caught by the wards surrounding Potter manor, was automatically sent to Hogwarts by the house elves which remained at the manor.

Dobby refused to answer. Knobby’s will weakened and the small creature found himself glaring heatedly at the uncooperative responses.

“Whatever you was doing at Potter manor, cannot be done. Master James put wards on manor. You is caught because of wards. They stop all creatures not keyed into master James’ wards.”

Dobby looked furious with himself.

Knobby sent him a frown. “I is not letting you go, until you is telling me why you behave like a bad elf.”

Dobby let out a frustrated screech. “I is only needing to talk to Ms. Jamie Potter.”

“Why is you wanting to talk to mistress?” Knobby demanded, sound rather odd considering his form of a house elf.

“No, no! Dobby can’t say. Dobby had to iron his hands for sneaking out!” His tennis ball eyes were wide in fear. He shook his head frantically and seemed to be arguing, mentally, with himself.

“I is telling you, Dobby. You is not leaving till I get the truth!” Knobby sighed. It was going to be a long night.

:Dream:

Harry blinked at his surroundings. He was in Tom's room, and for once he could spot the teen immediately. Tom was currently hunched over a desk and appeared to be writing frantically in a journal of some kind.

Upon closer examination, Harry saw that the journal was the very same that was in Lucius' possession. His curiosity was peaked. Cautiously, the younger boy walked up to Tom and waited until the quill stopped moving. Once the feather stopped, Tom let out an explosive breath and smiled coldly.

"Tom?" Harry said gently, as to not frighten his friend.

Said wizard spun around and stared at Harry in shock. "Harry! I've been waiting so long to talk to you. I must tell you about something I've recently discovered." Tom enveloped Harry in a hug and smiled genuinely when it was returned with eagerness.

"I've missed you," Harry muttered into his neck.

Tom pulled back and pecked his lips. "I missed you as well." He picked up his diary, not journal, and maneuvered Harry and himself to the bed.

Upon the deep brown sheets of his bed, Tom spread out his notes and placed the diary in the very center of the sheets of parchment. A small frown appeared between Harry's eyebrows as he looked at the diary with curiosity. Tom spread out over his bed lazily and grinned rather viciously.

"With this muggle diary, I have created something amazing, Harry. This diary will remain intact until the future days, maybe even as far as your time. Should I die by then, or if I am dying at the moment, this diary will be my source of survival. Along with this diary and Salazar's chamber, I have guaranteed myself a future."

Harry looked at Tom sharply. There were too many questions which needed to be asked. *What could be so great as to prolong his life in such a fantastic, not to mention secretive, way? How will it be preserved? Where the hell are Salazar's chambers? Tom must be*

using parseltongue to get in them. Only he, Voldemort and I could probably get into them. But why is he telling me about this?

"Why are you telling me this?" Harry asked with honest inquisitiveness.

"Don't you see, Harry? I might have a chance to live in the future with you! My diary might be there during your time at this very moment. In a few months you might even see me!" Tom's blue eyes flashed with excitement as he rambled a bit about how magnificent such an invention was.

"It's a muggle diary," Harry noted.

"Yes." Tom sneered. "Muggles, as useless as they are, have products which contain the barest amount of magic. For my spells and potions to work, I needed an object which would not clash with the sensitive magic."

"So you're saying that by using this muggle, magic free diary, you're spells would be able to work without interference." Harry stored that knowledge away for future reference. It was a useful tidbit.

Magic was very sensitive and if using muggle artifacts was easier then he would do so. After all, magical residue was very common and resided almost on every object in the wizarding world. Wizarding objects were also bursting with magic, this would make any new spells less affective. It was best to start with a clean slate, so to say.

"Precisely!" Tom picked up his diary and held it close to his chest. "I will have power, Harry. I will be great. Inventions like this diary will grant me my wish. Magic will give me the power I never had while living in that orphanage."

"What do plan to do, Tom?" Harry examined the many sheets of spells and information scattered across the bed.

"Do you know that I've found the location of my father, Harry? Are you going to turn on me as well? Are you going to flee and call me evil?" Tom spat vindictively.

Harry smiled. "All of mankind is evil. There is no one alive on this earth who is not evil in some way or another." He hesitantly embraced Tom. "You deserve your vengeance, Tom. I wish you good luck. I want to come back and see that you're still here, not Azkaban."

Tom carded his fingers through his friend's hair and smiled very faintly. "Thank you," he hissed.

Harry began fading away once more. Tom tightened his hold on the boy. "Goodbye, Harry."

"Bye, Tom," Harry whispered sadly.

Neither knew that this would be the last time Harry dreamt of Tom Riddle.



Chapter 6

Thy Victim

“Continue to stir clockwise until the hue of cobalt has darkened to navy,” Severus instructed.

Half the class had already failed to brew their potions correctly within the first 10 minutes of class. It was not long before the rest followed. The only people still working diligently on their potions were Harry, Draco, Theodore, and Hermione. They did as they were instructed and completed their potions.

Severus waved his hand signaling for the students to pack their belongings. Over the light scattering of noise he called for Harry and Draco to remain behind.

“What is it, Severus?” Harry asked with a small at his mentor.

Severus scowled darkly. “The headmaster has declared that all advanced Potions classes are to be cancelled. He has given me additional work to complete and so I have no time to spare for such lessons. I expect both of you in my quarters this weekend. We have much to discuss.”

He wrote passes for the silent boys and shoed them out of his classroom.

“I is trying to give great Jamie Potter a warning!” Dobby squealed as Knobby threatened to tell his master where Dobby was.

“What danger is you speaking of?”

“Only Jamie Potter is to know. I is bad elf already!” Dobby protested, glaring at the magical bounds.

Knobby snarled unpleasantly. "You is not to visit the Potters again. I and other elf will know if you try." With that he released the other house elf.

Dearest Jamie,

I'm happy to ask you to return to Potter Manor for the weekend. Your daddy and I have much to tell you, darling girl. Keep my letter secret, burn it in fact. The less people who know about your visit, the better. We don't want anyone prying in your affairs.

Love,

Mummy

Lucius paced along the length of his study. In his hand he clutched the leather bound diary of Tom Riddle. The diary itself had not changed since the boys had seen it. Since then, Lucius had taken to avoiding it. He was not entirely sure what the book was to do. He just knew that his lord had told him to place the diary at Hogwarts should he not return by 1992.

The diary thrummed with power despite it being muggle made. It made Lucius wary. He would still do as the Dark Lord asked however. He would have to keep the situation a secret as well. Draco knew nothing of his treachery to the light side. The boy was still happily living his delusions of good and bad. Lucius had forbid Narcissa from telling Draco the truth. Their son did not know Occlumency and his mind was open for anyone to discover the truth of the Malfoy elders.

Soon, once Draco had been tutored in Occlumency by Severus, they would tell him and hope that he would understand. He was still a child and did not know the fortifications of joining the Dark Lord. Lucius and

Narcissa could only pray that Draco would have more sense than to join the light side with just the word of his parents. As admirable as that trust was, it was idiotic as well. Draco was not raised to be a follower.

Lucius exhaled and brought a hand to his temples. Then there was the matter of Harry. The boy was a conundrum! There were no absolutes and no sure choices with him. Only two things were clear to Lucius about Harry. One, he would be a true friend for Draco and maybe more. Two, he despised the Potters. It would not be long before his lord would ask about Harry.

The diary fell from its hold and fell onto the ground. Lucius picked it up with a cursory glance. He snapped his fingers quickly and made a decision.

A small, brute looking house elf popped into his office. It did not speak for it was mute.

"Take this," Lucius shoved the diary into the hands of the bewildered elf. "toTo Hogwarts. Put it somewhere inconspicuous but make sure it can be found by a student."

The diary would lure its own prey to feed upon. Lucius could tell from the pull of magic emitting from the leather cover. He, himself had come close to writing in it twice already. The sooner it was gone from the Malfoy Manor the better. What better place for it to manifest than Hogwarts? The diary would not harm Draco...or Harry. The dungeons were long ago protected against any imperious magic.

Narcissa peeped into Lucius' study and narrowed her eyes immediately. Her husband was up to something, but what? The man had been steadily growing secretive over the past few weeks. What could possibly have caused him to hide from his own wife?

She was about to find out.

For the next few hours Narcissa watched as Lucius pulled out a muggle diary and examined it. It was nothing special from the looks of it, but even the dimmest could tell there was something that they could not see. Something about the leather bound journal was special for Lucius to be in possession of it.

Where had it come from? Who had it come from? Why had it been given to Lucius?

So many question's, pPractically no answers.! Narcissa was at a loss. She knew nothing of the diary or Lucius' plans concerning it. It was not as if she could waltz into the study and demand answers. Lucius may have loved her but he was far from whipped. Such treatment of her husband would not only prove that she was spying but that her business was becoming his.

Lucius would definitely not stand for it. He would most likely hex her in a most devious way and Narcissa wouldn't blame him. They were a dark family, and although it did not show much, they truly were.

Lucius Malfoy, was the dominant male in the Malfoy household. He held control and power over the house and all its occupants. Who was Narcissa to argue? Being his wife had merits, and she did love him. But it would take endangering the life of her family to her the woman to stand up to Lucius and his nefarious plots.

It was not long before Narcissa had heard what she needed to know.

She had seen and heard everything. From the strict order to the house elf, to the mutterings of his dilemma, her heart rate had doubled to an almost alarming rate. Her foolish husband was putting children in danger. He was putting Draco in danger!

In an act that would make a Gryffindor proud, Narcissa stormed into Lucius' study. She slapped him hard and took pleasure in the shock that lingered on his face. Within seconds his shock turned to thunderous rage. He pinned the small blonde woman to his desk and turned icy eyes on her.

"How dare you," Lucius whispered. His tone made her shiver in fear.

Narcissa would not relent however. She glared right back at him. "Don't, Lucius. I know what you have done. I know that you have endangered the children at Hogwarts. I know that you have put our son's life in danger! How could you?"

Lucius paled and released his hold fractionally. His eyes did not soften as he next spoke. "Listen well, woman. I have done everything that I have been told. That diary will make the future harder for us in many ways. I cannot concern myself with the lives of mudbloods. Our son is safe. He is not foolish enough to get tangled in the magic of the diary. So long as he stays away, Draco will remain as he is. This diary was our lord's. IT will not be long before he rises should it work as intended."

Narcissa stared at him wide-eyed and stopped her struggles. Lucius pulled back but drew her into a warm embrace. She clung to him tightly and refused to let her sorrow take the form of tears. "I am sorry, husband mine."

"You are a mother. I would not expect any less of you," said Lucius with a small smile. "I have done as our lord has asked me to. He has come to me in the form of a dream through my dark mark and has told me the situation. The diary will harm one child, two at the maximum. It is not seeking out to murder the entire population of mudbloods but only one child. This child will give him the power he needs to rise once again."

Narcissa frowned. She didn't like the idea of a child dying. The reward of her lord returning was far too good an opportunity to give up however. A small apology to the students of Hogwarts entered her mind before she succumbed to her husband's charm and the plans of her next letter to her son.

Tom Riddle shiftily watched his surroundings as he hurried to the chamber. His chamber actually. Salazar Slytherin had originally built the chamber and as his descendant, Tom now owned it.

The Chamber of Secrets was open at last.

He cursed Harry. He had wanted to show the boy his chamber. With their love of Slytherin and parseltongue abilities, both could enjoy the privacy of the chamber. Perhaps Harry would even take pleasure in conversing with the basilisk of the tunnels. Salazar Slytherin's very own basilisk at that!

Now Tom would have to wait for Harry's next visit, whenever that was. He cursed the boy again and silently admitted to himself that he missed Harry greatly. Time would stop their friendship eventually. Logic had already proved that the dreams would gradually desist. The question of the dreams no longer remained how, but when?

In a swift jump, Tom landed on the moving staircase a few steps in front of him. He had salvaged a small quantity of time but had also disoriented any intruders following him. They would wonder where Tom had disappeared off to as there were no hidden passages or stairways in sight.

Tom entered Myrtle's washroom and lowered himself down the pipe slowly. Tonight...tonight he would let loose the beast. Tonight he would wait with glee and anticipation as his snake murdered those unworthy of being taught at Hogwarts; mudbloods.

Tonight.

The Malfoy elf crept into an unused girl's washroom. It was empty aside from a curious, weeping ghost. The elf hurriedly dropped the diary into the shadows under the sink. He would not stay here longer than necessary.

There was an evil presence around the sinks. The magic around the area affected the diary very much. It was dark magic, the kind that could murder and torture its victim. The elf shuddered and disappeared with a crack. He pitied who the diary would lure into its trap.

The diary stirred underneath the sink. Its birthing home was near. Soon those doors would open and it would be able to breathe once again. It needed strength. With the death of innocents both the monster and the beast would arise to take glory in purging the wizarding world of mudbloods.

But first it needed a victim. A child would be best with their gullible, trusting and innocent minds. Someone weak, but strong, someone who needed a 'friend.' There! The diary surged with energy. A victim had been found.

The evil within the pages shivered weakly with life. Slowly it fed more power into the atmosphere. The dark magic drifted around the room and sank into the stone walls of Hogwarts.

It would grow, oh yes.

Ginny was bored. She was currently salvaging time in her schedule by using her History of Magic class as a period of reflection and serious thinking. Her mind was on a merry-go-round. Every thought she had directed her back to one person: Harry Potter. No! He was not a Potter any longer. Being sorted into Slytherin had taken that title away from him. Her long time crush was only Harry now. Only Harry. The redhead frowned at the odd tugging in her mind. She resumed her fantasizing.

I wish he had been in Gryffindor. We could have been together. I still remember when I used to go over to Potter Manor. Harry would be there, reading in some dark corner or staring out of windows or even playing with the house elves. He was always so nice; I don't know why Jamie hates him so much.

Ginny smiled and picked up her quill. Carefully, she dipped the nib into the inkpot and lowered the feathered pen to her parchment. Absentmindedly, she began to draw. At first it was a picture of brooms and hearts and other inane subjects which she liked. Then, they grew deeper in feeling. There were no more brooms but faces. Faces, and eyes especially.

The youngest Weasley was not a fantastic artist, but her work was enough to be recognizable. The parchment that lay innocently on the desk was soon marred with the face of Harry the *Slytherin*. Harry, the boy she fell in love with. Harry, the dark preteen who was friends with Draco Malfoy. Harry, the innocent eight year old.

And lastly, Harry, the boy with the sparkling green eyes.

Her parents would see that Harry was only misunderstood. He was too innocent, too perfect, to be a true Slytherin. Her parents would see.

Ginny was not obsessed. Her mind was perfectly capable of telling reality from fantasy. She was not Harry's girlfriend, he hardly noticed her. But...Ginny was a Weasley and Weasleys never gave up so easily. Often, Mrs. Weasley had told Ginny that she was pretty and beautiful. Harry would soon see that, he would fall in love with her as she was with him. He would see what was missing in life and his gorgeous emerald eyes would sparkle with delight every time he saw Ginny Weasley.

She had a plan.

Harry locked the door to his and Draco's room thoroughly. He let loose a loud puff of air and pulled out his wand. The room was empty of others. Theodore and Draco had decided to play a game of chess while Blaise had gone to his own room to compose a letter to his mother. Not for the first time, the lack of company was a reprieve.

Harry dropped to his knees and lifted the skirt of his bed. In a careful succession he disengaged the concealment charms he had placed around the bottom of the bed. The previously vacated floor was now occupied by a small serpent.

Aeni.

She slithered out from under the bed and wrapped herself around Harry's forearm. :Leave not again. The wood and cloth suffocates me, me who should be cherished not hidden like mold.:

:Hush Aeni. I could not take you with me yet. My wizard companions do not know of you. I will show you them tonight. By tomorrow you will see the sun again but you will be restricted to my arm instead of the floor.: Harry hissed cajolingly.

:Good! I will bite you and your magic comrades if you leave me to suffer for another day: Aeni's scales flashed from green to red cyclically.

She was envious of Harry's friends. They were around him all day *and* got to see the lovely warm sun each day. The snake was also angry, hence the red. The color of Mars, the God of War. Aeni was in the mood to bite someone, but she wouldn't. No, after all Harry had made her promise not to bite another human. Slyly, Aeni flicked out her tongue. Harry had said nothing about biting animals.

She let out an insane spitting laugh and hoped that a small rodent...or a big one, would enter the dormitory.

Ginny smiled at her Gryffindor classmates as they parted in separate ways. She had an urge to go the second floor. Usually her instincts had never let her wrong, so with a carefree expression she followed the pulling. Not once did the girl realize that she was steadily walking towards her own doom.

With an anxious grin Ginny stopped in front of Moaning Myrtle's washroom. She had been in there only once before and had never returned. It was horrid trying to use the 'loo', while the girl ghost inside, sobbed herself silly.

A bubble of fear erupted within her and suddenly she was wary of going into the washroom. The tugging increased and her feet moved on their own accord. Ginny paled as she stepped into the darkened room. Ever so slowly her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting.

A sharp stinging of magic had her swinging her head to stare at the pale sinks. They glowed eerily as if there was a secret just waiting to be told within their bowls. Ginny moved closer and let her hand trail across the cool porcelain. A light scratching stopped her movements. Blue eyes drifted downwards and widened.

A slightly tattered book...no diary lay by her foot. Warily she picked it up and studied the book carefully. As she lifted a corner of the cover the voice of her father entered her mind. The pull of the diary overrode it and before she could stop herself, Ginny opened the diary.

A flash of green light enveloped her stiff body and then there was darkness.

Chapter 7

Dear Diary

Ginny frowned as the ink in her quill ran out. She dipped it into the ink pot only to discover that there was no ink left at all. Sighing in frustration, the youngest Weasley ran to Hermione's dorm. The bookish girl always had spare pots of ink lined up in her trunk. Luckily she was lying on her bed, deeply immersed in her book.

"Hermione," Ginny said softly, hoping not to annoy the older girl.

For her efforts, Ginny received an acknowledging nod.

"Could I borrow some of your ink?"

"Whatever for?" Hermione asked putting down her book. "We've only just arrived at school. Surely you can't be out of ink already?"

"My inkpot broke and I wanted to save the other for class. I don't want to fall behind on notes," Ginny said shakily, knowing that her note comment would persuade Hermione easily.

"Oh all right. Take one of the spares. You know where I keep it." Hermione smiled and buried her nose into the text once again.

Smiling happily this time, Ginny gathered the pot and ran back to her dorm. She still had so much to write in her diary. She wanted to write to Tom, the boy who responded to her from the diary. He was always understanding of her needs and feelings. She could pour her heart out to the boy and he would always respond accordingly. Tom existed within the pages, and wasn't real in her world; and therefore could not repeat her words to another living soul. It was what every girl dreamed of.

The diary had never ending pages, which were never used anyways; as the ink absorbed into the sheet and left no marks behind. It was water resistant from what Ginny could tell. Like the ink any other

liquids which touched the diary they would automatically be absorbed and taken Merlin knows where.

Most of the time Ginny wrote about Harry. Harry was always at the forefront of her mind, always plaguing her thoughts with the shy smiles he gave her when he was a little boy. Tom never complained though and for that Ginny continued talking to him. However, sometimes she would feel odd and parts of her memories would seem blank; but if there was something wrong, Ginny ignored it. After all, what could a simple diary do to her?

She ignored her father's warnings as the diary filtered through the dark space in her mind.

Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain.

"What was Tom trying to tell me with his diary?" Harry muttered aloud, staring up at his canopy.

Will he be all right? Murder...I have only seen it in my dreams. Will I dream of Tom? Will I see him murder his own flesh and blood? Many times I've wanted to murder my own parents, but could I really do it?

Yes...no...

He didn't know. Harry prayed to Merlin that his friend would be safe. He hoped that the boy would be there the next time he dreamt so he could ask more about the diary. It was unlucky that the dream ended so quickly. Tom's information about Salazar's chambers would have been appreciated greatly. Harry was positive that the founder of Slytherin house had books written in parseltongue there. Those books would be something that only he and Tom knew. It would be a secret weapon against the world and that was something that always ended in a fortuitous nature.

Lucius had his diary. There must be something extraordinarily special about it that Tom didn't mention to me. He did say that it would be the cause of his resurrection should he die. But why would Lucius want to do that? How does he even know about Tom Riddle in the first place? Could it be that Tom was one of Voldemort's followers and Lucius is really on the dark side?

Draco will be ecstatic, Harry thought with mirth.

Back to the topic at hand, Harry needed some answers and the only people who could give them to him were Lucius and Tom. Lucius would in no way explain anything to Harry because the man sure as hell didn't trust Harry yet. He was just a 12 year old boy who knew far too much for his own good. To Lucius, Harry was his son's best friend and an abused orphan born to the Potter family. There was no way Harry would get any answers from Lucius; so he was crossed off the two person list.

Tom would have some explaining to do the next time they met.

Lucius caressed his dark mark and stared at nothing in particular. Everything had gone according to plan so far. The diary had been sent to Hogwarts just as his master had ordered. He had lied to his wife; by sending the diary to Hogwarts he had placed his son in danger. The chances of Draco getting hurt were very slim but the fact that he had done it nevertheless disgusted the man.

His son was innocent. Draco knew nothing, and was off at school thinking that his parents were on the light side. The child knew nothing of what Lucius had gone through and what he was doing at the moment. If only... if only Draco was instructed in the art of Occlumency.

Draco was too young to attempt Occlumency. His mind was still evolving and it would take at least another year or so before the boy could begin learning. Lucius would have Severus teach Draco everything. Then and only then, would the truth be revealed.

Only then would Draco know that his parents were on the darker side of war. They served a genius who was often mistaken for a monster. Although some of the crimes that Voldemort committed were heinous, the reasons behind them were understood. Lucius and Narcissa, despite their calm side, were no saints to torture. They had participated in it many times and could to this day say that they enjoyed it.

Neither parent knew how Draco would take it. Would the boy be disgusted with their lifestyle? Would he reveal his own secrets about wanting to join the dark side? Would he sympathize with them? Or would he disappear?

Perhaps Draco Malfoy, son of the prestigious Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, would buckle under the pressure and leave before he collapsed. That was what some of the children in Slytherin families did. When they could not take their role in life, they did not end it, they ran away. It was cowardly, but since when had pride ruled over the instinct of survival?

Lucius could not answer his questions truthfully. He wanted to be blind to the future. He could not bear to see his son's life bleed out from within his body, but it had had to be done. It was the only chance of his family surviving the war. The light would not murder his family, but Voldemort would at the hint of any betrayal. Lucius was in far too deep to leave *his* clutches.

The dark lord would rise.

"You wanted to talk, Draco?" Harry frowned in concern and sat back on his bed.

Draco nodded and sat adjacent to his friend. "Harry, my father told me that he is a spy for the light, but..." Draco trailed off and closed his eyes.

"You don't know what side you believe in." Harry smiled understandingly. "I've guessed that already. We've also had this conversation before."

"I needed to talk about it. I can't choose. If I choose the dark side then I'd be betraying my father and my mother as well."

Harry paused and decided that he would tell Draco his suspicions. "Do you think that maybe your father is spying for someone else other than Dumbledore?"

"Of course I've thought that. But Harry, it wouldn't make much sense. All my evidence leads to him truly being on the light side." Draco placed a hand over his face. "I don't know what to do."

Harry pulled the hand away from Draco's pale face and held it tightly. "I'll be here for you no matter what side you choose."

"What about you Harry? What side did you choose? What side will you choose?" Draco questioned almost urgently.

"I don't know, Draco. Neither side has given me much incentive to join. As for the future, maybe I'll remain neutral."

Draco was nearly glaring at him. "You're the boy-who-lived! You'll have to join a side... or...you'll have to create your own side."

"I'm only 12 years old. Why the hell should I know what I will do in the future? Maybe I don't want to participate in this war. No one, other than you and Voldemort," he ignored Draco's flinch, "knows who I really am. Let the world think Jamie is the chosen one. Voldemort won't care too much if I don't join a side. He'll still be able to kill Jamie and win the war. Dumbledore can go on believing in his little savior for all I care. Her death is no loss to me."

Draco curled his arms around the flushed boy. "I'll stick with you, Harry. No matter what path you choose, I will follow you."

"I'm not your leader, Draco. You can't adhere to me like a follower," Harry snapped.

"I don't want to." Draco smirked. "I'm staying by your side for insurance purposes you realize. You hold the power to keep me alive throughout this war. Besides...I'm rather fond of your company."

Harry blinked at his friend. A slow smile spread over his face and he chuckled. "I thought this was to be a serious conversation."

Draco scoffed. "It was. We're finished with the subject for now. It's getting far too depressing for a Malfoy."

Harry threw a pillow at the blond, eyes sparkling with laughter. Draco hid his smug smile. He had not only accomplished choosing a side but also making Harry enjoy himself.

"We've copied the wand movements in a step by step process so that it will be easier to understand," Theo explained patiently.

"It's about time we began learning this," Blaise said excitedly.

Together they crowded around the parchment and practiced the wand movements. It was half an hour later that they felt ready to move onto the next step. The wand movements had not been too difficult. The next step was the second hardest; the incantation. The incantation had to be perfect for the spell to work. Should one of them be slightly off the spell would not work at all. For another half an hour they recited the incantation until it was burned in their memory and tongue.

"Can we do the spell yet?" Blaise whined.

Draco threw him a disgusted look. "I hope you realize it will take us some time to actually perform the spell. Don't tell me you thought we'd get it on the first try."

Blaise glared and tinged slightly. For someone who was so academically intelligent, Blaise Zabini could be an idiot at times.

“Don’t argue,” Theo snapped. He held up his wand threateningly.

Harry repeated the gesture and pasted a small smile on his face. “I think we should start. If we want to have this working before summer starts then we ought to practice regularly. It’s advanced magic and should anyone discover what we have done they will report it to the headmaster. That means keep quiet when you are attempting the spell and do it in a secluded place where absolutely no one can barge in. The last thing we need is discovery or a botched attempt gone wrong.”

Draco smirked in amusement and held up his wand as well. Blaise readily held up his wand and grinned. “Let’s get cracking, yeah?”

In unison the other three rolled their eyes meanwhile questioning whether Blaise would be the first or last to successfully cast the spell.

“Hullo Hagrid,” Harry greeted with a small smile reserved only for close friends.

“I was beginnin’ to think yeh forgot ‘bout me,” Hagrid said cheerfully.

“I’ve been busy lately. I wanted to come and talk to you though. How was your summer?”

Harry sat down as Hagrid began to rattle on about some fascinating work in the forbidden forest involving creatures. He spoke of Severus slightly and told Harry about the different species which were attracted by Severus’ personally grown herbs. Harry despite being a little annoyed at the rambling was amused and interested by the events in the forest.

“ ‘ow was yer summer with Charlie, ‘Arry?” Hagrid inquired, looking eager about the prospect of dragons.

“It was amazing. I learnt much information about dragons, their habitats, their feeding rituals and even mating and birthing processes.

Charlie let me do some work around the facility for a few extra galleons. Nothing overly eventful happened and I met Bill when they came to tune the wards.” Harry took a sip of his tea and smiled faintly as he remembered his summer.

“And did yeh see...Norbert?” Hagrid asked. He looked sad and excited at the same time.

Harry nodded. “Norbert was doing fine. He’s well cared for there. Charlie and the other keepers are lenient and caring. They cater to his needs especially because he’s still young. He looks happy Hagrid.”

Hagrid nodded. Thick tears slipped down his cheeks into his beard.

Harry’s eyes betrayed his sympathy for the man. “Perhaps you should go visit Norbert sometime, Hagrid. I’m sure Charlie wouldn’t mind so much. He actually seemed as if he was waiting for you to visit.”

“If I get the time then I’d be happy to. Dumbledore’ll let me off for a day I suppose.” Hagrid looked much more cheerful after that. The conversation took a turn for odd magical creatures and dragons. All in all it was a cheerful way to spend teatime.

Harry hugged Severus hard as he walked into the potion master’s chambers. The dour man blinked in surprise but slowly drew his arms around the boy. Draco watched in amusement and slight jealousy. He wasn’t sure where the jealousy was coming from but pushed it aside almost immediately. No good came out of irrational envy.

Harry pulled back and flopped down on one of the couches. It was a relief to see him acting more comfortable around them. He no longer had a constant mask on and seemed to be at ease with expressing his emotions.

"I've missed you, Severus." Harry turned suddenly shy eyes at his mentor.

"I have missed you both as well," Severus admitted. He pulled Draco into his embrace and smiled slightly at the boys.

They sat down and spoke of light matters concerning school and their social life. Severus allowed Draco and Harry to relax at first. He wanted them to be prepared for when he would question them about the summer. They knew he would. Harry was grateful that Severus was giving them time to sort out their thoughts. Draco on the other hand was a tad vexed that Severus wanted to bring up the topic.

He and Harry had already gone over the events and made up. They had apologized and taken into account each other's feelings about the topics that were discussed. Hell, they had even learned to accept some of the comments that were made that awful day.

"Sev, can we not talk about this," Draco asked stubbornly. "What's there to discuss anyway? Harry and I have talked everything out."

Harry looked torn between agreeing and disagreeing. In the end he settled for an indifferent mask.

"You were both informed that we would have a conversation. Neither one of you are part of the usual buffoons that pass through these halls. You clearly knew that we would talk about this summer, Draco. Try not to make this difficult."

Draco huffed but kept silent. He had tried, albeit weakly, but Severus rid him of any notion that this would be anything but difficult.

"Severus," Harry said softly. "Draco is right in some regard but you have the right to know what happened this summer."

Severus sat down next to the boy as he was becoming accustomed to. "Start at the beginning, Harry. I would rather cure your insecurities than hide them away. The easier way may not always be the proper way to accomplishing a task."

Harry nodded and leaned into the taller man. He beckoned Draco over. The blond boy smiled and sat down next to his best friend. Together they went through everything that happened in detail. They included their emotions and their thoughts at the time which pleased Severus. They were not attempting to hide anything from him showing the wizard that the two boys trusted him and themselves.

Draco sighed. "And now we aren't fighting and sniveling like a bunch of Hufflepuffs."

Harry frowned slightly but did not comment. He did not want to begin another fight. Besides, Draco would never listen to him even if he did try to reason with him. Severus also frowned.

"As much as I detest Hufflepuffs in public eye, I will not hide my respect for their traits. Resiliency and loyalty are admirable traits, Draco. The members of Hufflepuff may be the weakest of the Hogwarts four, but they in their own right are powerful. Never underestimate a person with a skill. After all, it does not take much to destroy," Severus reprimanded.

Draco looked properly ashamed and buried his face into Harry's side. "What happened to Sev? He's never cared before."

Severus sneered. "Desist the use of that boorish nickname or I will show you exactly why I inspire fear."

Draco grinned and stuck his tongue out at the man. "I feel much safer now knowing that it is Sev and not some impostor."

Harry couldn't help but laugh. Draco soon joined in. Severus sneered once more, disapprovingly, then ushered the boys out of his rooms. Draco had been correct. They had indeed worked out the issues. Only time would help with any lingering effects from such harsh words.

Jamie walked into the headmaster's office. She looked at the headmaster and frowned faintly. Neither her parents nor the old man had given her information as to why she had to return to Potter manor for the weekend. Of course, Jamie was pleased about seeing her parents again but she could not shake off the curiosity within.

When she arrived at Potter manor, she would get some answers. Jamie daintily threw the glittering floo powder into the grate and stepped in carefully. With a small breath she clearly called out her destination and was whisked off to her home.

Chapter 8

Blood Stained Hands

Ginny smirked, eyes glowing suspiciously red. Her hands squeezed tighter around the rooster's neck, nails digging into the skin, taking the light from its eyes. She couldn't let her precious pet be murdered before it accomplished its job. There were still plenty of muggleborns in the school and not a single one had died yet. It would all change that day. The beast would come out now that she had destroyed the threat.

The last rooster fell to the ground, dead. Ginny raised her hand to her face and slowly licked the blood off her hand. "Pity," she whispered. "It's gotten cold."

The wind picked up around Harry and Theo, stinging them uneasily.

Something had happened.

Silently they moved closer together and held their wands at their sides. It never hurt to be prepared. Theo nodded towards the school in acquiesce. Harry hurried towards the front doors, alert. When they entered the main hall they were surprised to see a large crowd.

"What happened," Theo asked a sixth year Slytherin.

"Filch's cat was found dead by Malfoy and Zabini. They're being accused," he groaned.

Harry and Theo didn't stay to hear the details. They slithered through the crowd and remained stoic even as their eyes fell upon the scene. Draco and Blaise stood to the side, staring transfixed at a dead Mrs. Norris. It was one of the more gruesome deaths that one heard about.

The cat's tail hung on the wall by a nail and its detached body had a large gaping hole through it. Harry could hear sobs and gags from behind him. He couldn't help but feel sorry for the cat.

"This is," a Gryffindor boy, by the name of Neville, whispered.

To his surprise, Harry and Theo turned to him. "It is horrible, Longbottom," Theo said blankly. "Do you know what the grapevine is saying?"

"N...no," Neville stammered. "I just know that those two are being blamed. I don't think that they could do it though. They were at dinner and we only just got out when we saw this. Just because they were a little ahead of us everyone thinks that they did it."

Harry smiled inwardly. Perhaps this Neville boy wasn't as stupid as he had thought. Neville, taken off guard by the faint smiles on Harry and Theo's faces, hesitantly smiled back. Draco took his eyes off the cat at that moment and spotted Harry. His grey eyes narrowed at the smile directed at Neville.

"Harry."

Green and grey eyes met.

"What have you gotten yourself into?" Harry asked lowly.

Draco lowered his voice. "Nothing, we didn't do this."

Harry grabbed Draco's hand and Theo grabbed Blaise's. "Let's get out of here."

They quickly pushed their way out of the horde and sprinted off towards the common room. Severus would cover for Draco and Blaise if anyone asked. Right now the two boys were too far into shock to provide any answers. Right now, Harry and Theodore were greatly worried for their best friends.

"Blaise, Draco." Theo sat down in front of them, his blank face melting into worry.

"We're all right, just a little surprised and disgusted," Blaise said warily.

"What happened?" Harry sat down adjacent to Theo and looked at them expectantly.

"No one else heard it because we got there first," Draco stated.

"There was a voice, it sounded a lot like a female but had a lisp. It was hard to tell who it was," Blaise continued.

"It said that the Chamber of Secrets has been opened, enemies of the heir beware."

Harry froze. *The Chamber of Secrets.*

TOM.

He felt so confused. What was going to happen? Was Tom alive? Is he the one behind this? He had said that he knew how to enter the chamber. Perhaps he would know what might have killed Mrs. Norris or at least possible people who were behind this. Hopefully his next dream would occur soon.

"Albus, what do you think could have happened?" Professor McGonagall asked, fearfully. She was still in a state of shock, not being accustomed to seeing murdered cats. It had hit close to home as her animagus form was a cat.

"I am as clueless as you are my dear Professor McGonagall. I believe that we must speak to the first witnesses in this crime. Unfortunately, they have escaped my eyes and I will have to summon them tomorrow," Albus said easily.

Severus glared at the man. "According to the other students, Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Zabini arrived only a few seconds prior to the rest of

the student body. I hardly think that they shall know anymore about this than we do.”

“Perhaps you are correct, Severus, but I feel we should not take any chances.”

“What do you mean, Albus?” McGonagall leaned forward and looked at him disapprovingly. “Surely you aren’t suggesting...*that!*”

“I’m afraid we have no other choice. Were the students not of Slytherin house I feel we would not need to take such measures; but I’m afraid that the Slytherins do like to keep their secrets if only to protect themselves. It is an admirable trait but at the moment it is standing in the way of our progress. We must get to the bottom of this soon, or else I fear the next time we will not be so lucky. Next time a student might be on the receiving end of death.” Dumbledore sighed and avoided eye contact with Severus.

He did not have to try hard because the door burst open and Argus Filch fell in. He lay on the floor in a pitiful heap. McGonagall and Dumbledore quickly helped the poor man to his feet. Their looks of pity and sympathy nauseated Severus. He sneered in Filch’s direction and watched as McGonagall led him to a chair.

He sat down heavily and sobbed most disgustingly. “My cat! My poor, poor cat! Oh, Mrs. Norris! Someone killed her! Those brats did it! They murdered my cat! You must do something headmaster!”

“It is most unfortunate that you must suffer from the death of a loved one, Argus. Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Zabini are innocent until proven guilty however and I cannot ease your pain by prosecuting them in an unrighteous manner. We are looking into the case, Argus, so please go rest and mourn for Mrs. Norris. You will need your strength in the upcoming days.”

Filch agreed and nodded to the headmaster, McGonagall, completely ignored Severus and left the office.

“Minerva, would you kindly make sure that Argus returns to his room safely?”

McGonagall nodded curtly and left as well.

“Now that that has been settled, I must ask you to perform the task, Severus,” Dumbledore said in a grave tone.

Severus glared at him.

“Would you like a lemon drop, Severus?” Dumbledore asked softly. “It will do you no good to get worked up like this.”

“You have just asked me to do heinous things to my students yet you have the gall to tell me to calm down.”

“They were at the scene of the crime first. Surely they might have seen or heard something. I am simply asking you to check their minds for any clues leading to the perpetrator.”

“No. Absolutely not,” Severus snarled.

“If you do not, then I will,” Dumbledore said sharply, eyes flashing.

“You will regret this one day, headmaster!” Snape stalked out of the room leaving a saddened headmaster in his wake.

Dumbledore turned to his phoenix and stroked the warm plumage. “Where did I go wrong, Fawkes? More importantly, when did I go wrong?”

Fawkes chirped soothingly but it failed to relight the sparkle in his eyes.

Ginny shot up in her bed blinking rapidly. Her dream had been rather unusual and frightening. Most of them were these days. She noticed odd things about herself which made her perturbed. Sometimes she would wake without reason only to find blood or feathers scattered on her clothes and flesh under her nails.

It scared her to no end but no one, not even Jamie believed her when she tried to tell them about her dreams. She had given up and in result had lost much sleep since then. Ron and Hermione were worried about her but they had their own issues and couldn't help her anymore. She desperately wished that Harry would come to her rescue.

Luckily, her diary was there to help her cope. Without Tom, she would have broken down by now. Mrs. Norris' death affected her especially. Ginny loved cats and even if she was rude, Mrs. Norris did not deserve such an awful death.

Lily and James hugged their daughter tightly not a moment after she stepped out of the fireplace. Jamie held onto her mother after the embrace was broken and looked up at her with demanding eyes.

"Why did you call me home, mummy? I know there's more to it than what you wrote in the letter."

Lily smiled. "We have something to tell you about your future."

"It isn't bad news mind you," James chipped in. "Dumbledore's informed us that he will start you training soon. In the meantime to prepare you for that, your mother and I will be teaching you everything we know from the very beginning."

Lily sat down and pulled her daughter into her lap. "What James is trying to say is that we will start teaching you from the basics. So even if you already have knowledge of certain things, you will have to bear with us and listen extra carefully as we teach you. You are intelligent, Jamie but we need to make sure the basics are firmly implanted in your mind so that you have an easier time learning harder magic."

"That's right," James agreed, smiling at her.

Jamie frowned for a moment and thought over what she was being told. It sounded like a well planned idea and surely the extra studies would help her get top marks in her classes. Then she could at last show a certain Slytherin boy just how smart she really was. Besides, her mum could teach her better than Hermione ever could. The bushy-haired bookworm didn't know how to explain things in terms which others could understand and tended to ramble on about the subject.

"Darling, we'll start teaching you tomorrow. For now just enjoy your day with us," Lily said softly.

Jamie nodded. "Okay, thanks mummy, daddy. I'll do my best to make you proud."

She knew that most of the students at Hogwarts didn't believe she loved her parents all that much. They were so very wrong. Deep within, she did harbour a desire to make her parents proud of her. She knew they already were and who wouldn't be. She had accomplished so much already but it never seemed enough. After all, James and Lily had disowned Harry for Jamie's sake and for that she was ever grateful.

One day Jamie would completely ruin her former brother and make her parents happier than they had ever been. She would destroy Voldemort if he ever came back and earn her place in society as the Prime Minister and overall heroine of the wizarding world.

:Young one, you are doing what I hope.: Aeni hissed as she curled around Harry's arm.

:It is time my friends meet you. You cannot hide under my bed forever.: Harry told her as he sat down on his bed to wait for the arrival of the other Slytherins. They would be arriving shortly as Harry had requested their presence.

:Speaker, you are impudent. They will see me whether you choose to make it easy or not.: Aeni seemed pleased by her comment although it seemed to confuse Harry somewhat.

:I have not seen much of you and have become suspicious to be honest. What have you been up to these days: Harry asked, lying back on his bed.

:Nothing to concern yourself with.:

Harry nearly groaned. He had known that Aeni would be a challenge to keep and her evasiveness at the moment was doing nothing to ease his conclusion.

:Please tell me you have not harmed anyone.: Harry hissed, eyes narrowed.

His suspicions about Aeni being Mrs. Norris' killer were getting stronger. He had not seen the snake at all that day and it looked as if Mrs. Norris died of some sort of poisoning before she was stabbed. And didn't Aeni change sizes when they had first met? The snake could have grown larger before murdering the cat. Emerald eyes flashed.

:Blood boils in you young one. I am not guilty for I know what you will say.: Aeni slithered up dangerously close to his neck.

:Did you kill the feline: Harry closed his eyes and waited for her answer.

:Listen human, I spoke of innocence and you have ignored it. My reasons are none for killing the feline. It was not I who is the guardian of the Chamber of Secrets, it is something much more powerful.:

:Chamber of Secrets: Harry shot upright and pried the snake away from his body. He set her down firmly in front of him and glared. :What do you know about the Chamber of Secrets? Who was it that killed the feline? Why did you not tell me before, I know your sense of smell could have detected some danger:

:Calm human. I know little about the Secrets of Chamber. The one who killed, I am forbidden to speak of. She mentioned the Chamber as she fled from the scene.: Aeni looked at him balefully and coiled up. :Sleepy I am. Friends are almost here, speaker. I will meet with them and then go to dreams of her.:

To Harry, Aeni sounded a bit love-struck when she talked of the other thing. It was most likely a snake but Harry didn't want to jump to conclusions just yet. There were other things, such as people who could speak parseltongue or something close enough for Aeni to understand. The workings of an animal were odd as well. They could communicate by body language and so once again, whatever it was could have been another animal closely related to the snake.

He sighed and picked her up again, much to his protest. Before their conversation could escalate further, the door opened and in piled Draco, Blaise and Theodore.

They greeted him cheerfully. Harry found it rather amusing that none of them noticed his snake. It took a minute or so for them to realize and surprisingly it was Blaise who noticed Aeni first.

"What the hell?" he yelled, pointing at her. "What is it?"

"I feel ashamed on your behalf, Slytherin," Theodore deadpanned. He sat down next to Harry and looked at the snake curiously. "I've never seen one that's quite like this. What breed is it?"

"I don't know. It's a hybrid. A scientist was experimenting on her and that's all that she can remember. She killed him and ran away. I found her when I was in Romania with Charlie and decided to keep her as a familiar of sorts," Harry explained, letting Theo have a closer look at her. "We decided that she would be called Aeni."

:He smells of old paper.: Aeni hissed. She sized him up and down then hissed approvingly. :I am pleasant towards him.:

"She likes you," Harry translated. Theo smiled. "Tell her that I like her as well."

:He says you are pleasant as well.: Harry told her. She seemed content and pointedly looked at Draco.

The boy got the idea and sat down on the other side of Harry. He found the snake beautiful and was happy that Harry felt free enough to get a pet. His mind however was uneasy with her. Mrs. Norris' recent demise had him troubled lately. Harry showing him a snake now was having a large impact on his judgment. The snake had magical powers, he could sense it. There was something Harry wasn't telling them. He would drill the boy later. For now, he ran a gentle finger down the snake's back and smiled as she leaned into his touch.

:That one is nice of smell.: Aeni hissed. :Pet me later, human.:

Harry laughed. "Apparently you smell nice, Draco. She wants you to pet her later as well."

"Nice meeting you, Aeni," Draco replied.

Harry translated his words for her and beckoned Blaise over. As soon as he got near, Aeni uncurled herself from Harry's forearm and slithered towards Blaise. He jumped slightly and gave her a reproachful look.

"You shouldn't tease people, it's rather rude," Blaise said, pouting.

Harry told Aeni what she said and she let out a hissing laugh. :Humour in this one, I will like.:

"Despite what you might think, Blaise, she actually likes you," Harry said with a smirk.

"So, now that introductions are over," Draco began.

"You're kicking us out aren't you?" Theo finished.

"However did you know?" Draco responded with a teasing smile.

"Well then, good night," Blaise said, already halfway out the door. Theo rolled his eyes and quickly followed. "See you tomorrow."

Draco closed the door behind them and fell onto his bed. "I'm exhausted."

"What did you do that got you so tired?" Harry asked stretching out on his own bed.

Draco lolled his head around to look at Harry. "Theo had me and Blaise help him with a potion. It was fairly simple but I ended up teaching both Theo and Blaise how to make it."

"Have you thought about a career in Potions?" Harry inquired. "You are quite good at it."

"Sev told me that as well, like I told him, I'm not sure about anything concerning my future," Draco said warily.

"We're young, you'll figure it out eventually," Harry said, attempting to lighten his friend's mood.

Draco didn't feel like talking about his future anymore. It was depressing him and the burden on his shoulders seemed to get heavier. Being a Malfoy earned you a lot of privileges but it also brought a world of judgment upon you. Draco wasn't ready to step up just yet and take control of the name. He decided that changing the subject would suit them both better and allow him to escape Harry's sharp eyes. His best friend worried about him far too much already and didn't need a larger burden. Draco had imposed on Harry enough as it was.

"Say, Harry, I know you left out something about your snake. I can feel magic coming off of her," Draco said stoically.

"I didn't want you to get any ideas," Harry explained, feeling sweat gather up around his hairline.

"What can she do?" Draco was sitting up now, looking intently at Aeni.

"Her maker's experimentation has given her the power to change size and colour." Aeni hissed softly as Harry spoke and slithered up his lap to rest on his stomach. She could feel the rising tension between the two boys.

“Harry.”

“No, Draco. She didn’t do it.”

“How do you know that?” Draco nearly yelled.

“I trust her!” Harry snapped, eyes flashing. “Besides, she’s given me clues towards who the culprit is.”

“Harry.”

“Draco, stop. She doesn’t have experience in the world as it is, how on Earth would she be able to kill Mrs. Norris and say something about the Chamber of Secrets? It was a human voice you heard was it not? Aeni has not met any humans here besides you, Blaise and Theodore. If she had I would have known because I’ve placed a charm on her to make sure she doesn’t hurt anyone!” Harry was nearly standing by the time he finished.

Draco made his way over to stand in front of Harry. His hands automatically went to the boy’s shoulders as he looked down into fiery green eyes. “Are you positive that she has nothing to do with it?”

“100,” Harry replied, eyes downcast.

“Then I believe you,” Draco said with an exasperated sigh. “Your intuition has never failed us yet.”

Harry smiled at the blond and pulled him into a hug. “Thanks, Draco.”

Draco tugged his earlobe playfully. “What are friends for? Besides, maybe if we solve this mystery we’ll get an award from the school.”

“I think that we should talk to Severus first. Maybe we aren’t supposed to get involved in this.” Harry looked at Draco meaningfully.

Suddenly the Malfoy heir comprehended what Harry meant. *Maybe Lucius and Severus had something to do with this.* “We shouldn’t put ourselves in danger unknowingly. We’ll talk to Severus tomorrow.”

Draco smiled at him and nodded. He quickly turned off the lights using his wand. "Let's get some sleep then, yeah?" He crawled into his bed blindly and sighed in comfort.

Harry chuckled. "All right, but you're still in your robes."

Harry received no answer. It seemed as if Draco had fallen asleep already.

Draco lay awake in bed, contrary to what Harry thought. His breathing was soft but ragged and a trill of fear was making its way up his spine. He wasn't sure exactly why he felt so frightened. The fiasco that had happened concerning Mrs. Norris had been awful but it wasn't enough to scare him. No, this was something else, something far worse.

But what was it? His mind screamed.

Draco released a small sigh, making sure it wasn't loud enough to alert Harry. He had to speak to his parents. His father and mother would definitely know something about what was happening at school. Perhaps their voices alone would be enough to comfort him. That strange feeling of despair was slowly choking him and he couldn't help but hope Harry didn't feel it.

Harry bit his lip and rolled over to face the wall instead of Draco's back. He could tell that the blond wasn't entirely asleep. It did not hurt that he had been lied to or so he told himself. Something was troubling Draco to the point where he couldn't even speak of it. Harry was worried. Did Mrs. Norris' death affect him that much?

It might not have been the cat itself that made Draco look so awful, it might have been death itself. Harry had felt it in the corridor. The aura of emptiness and utter calamity had overtaken him almost when he had entered the hall in which Mrs. Norris was killed.

His heartbeat had sped up and his skin had been covered in goosebumps. He couldn't even imagine how Draco had felt, being in the center of it all. Blaise as well would have felt awful. He hoped Blaise was being taken care of by Theodore and that the mouse-haired boy was doing a better job at comforting than he was.

He shut his eyes tightly and took a deep breath. What kind of friend was he? He shouldn't have questioned Draco about his career knowing that it would sadden him. And he most definitely should have refrained from yelling at him. *Draco's emotions must be on edge right now*, Harry thought sadly.

He furrowed his brow and thought for a moment. Making up his mind, Harry determinedly got out of bed and made his way towards Draco's bed. The sudden noises alerted Draco and he could no longer pretend to be asleep. He lifted his head from his pillow and looked at Harry in surprise.

"Shove over," Harry ordered.

Draco did so without complaint. He watched in amazement as Harry crawled into his bed and snuggled up to him. Draco hesitantly wrapped his arms around the smaller boy and frowned in confusion.

"Harry?"

Harry huffed. "You won't admit you're scared, so I'm taking initiative. So please save me from further embarrassment and go to sleep."

Draco grinned and wrapped his arms more securely around his best friend. "Thanks, Potter."

"Shut up, Malfoy."

Blaise smiled at the boy who lay beside him. They had not spoken much since they had left Draco and Harry's room but nothing needed to be said. Theo had instructed Blaise to get ready for bed

immediately and allowed no words of complaint to be uttered. Blaise found himself grateful that his friend understood him well enough to know that he didn't feel like talking.

Theodore had then, surprising Blaise, crawled into bed with him and smiled. "You look like you need to extra warmth."

Blaise had blushed in embarrassment but had grinned in response. They had not fallen asleep quickly however and lay in silence, thinking to themselves.

Theo tried not to frown. He hoped Blaise didn't feel like a coward. They had known each other long enough for Theo to know exactly what was going on in Blaise's head. The taller boy would worry himself to sleep and think of the most horrible things. Then he would face nightmares and wake up screaming. Theo would then have to leave the warmth of his own bed and cuddle up next to Blaise to get the boy to fall asleep again. It was quite a routine. Mind you the nightmares were never serious, but to Blaise they were the worst.

Theo had never made fun of him for it and simply continued to sooth his friend. At the moment he didn't feel like lulling his friend into an easy slumber. His mind was too preoccupied and he felt that Blaise wouldn't appreciate the effort this time. They both had too many suspicions on their minds.

Lucius,

Your son and Blaise Zabini have been accused of murdering Argus Filch's cat. By Merlin's name, if you do not contact me within 24 hours to explain what the bloody hell is going on then I shall make sure your wife is informed of the situation.

Severus

Severus replaced his quill in the ornate inkpot on his desk and stared at his letter in satisfaction. Lucius would respond within minutes of receiving his letter. They would need to set up a time and place to meet, however and Narcissa could not be in the vicinity at all. She would skin both Severus and Lucius alive for allowing something like that to happen.

Hopefully Draco and Blaise would keep it to themselves and not write to their mothers about it. Severus did not want an angry Narcissa Malfoy harping him about keeping her son safe. He sympathized with Lucius when it came to Draco's well being, really he did.

It was not as if Severus could have done something though. He had no idea that something like Mrs. Norris being murdered would ever happen. It was quite obvious to him that Lucius had something to do with it. The one year where Lucius was contacted by the Dark Lord after a decade was the one year where something truly drastic happened; an actual murder occurred.

This might be the work of that diary, Severus thought. But...how would the diary come to be at Hogwarts and how would it be activated? The fact that it was a muggle diary did not faze Severus at all. He knew that muggle diaries were better to use if you wanted to enchant them because of their minimal magical residue. The diary had come from the Dark Lord's belongings, but what was it?

There was something more to it that he could not understand. That was what stood in the way of looking deeper into the matter. If he did not know what the diary did, then he could not examine the school for signs that the dairy was active.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned softly. Why must things always, always go downhill just as they started looking up?

Chapter 9

What The Hell?

It was a Saturday and so the Slytherins were lounging around in their common room and relaxing. To their surprise, Severus entered the common room seeking Blaise and Draco. They knew what was happening to a certain degree and pointed him off in the correct direction. It was never a good idea to get on the bad side of your head of house, especially when said head was Severus Snape.

Severus quickly found Blaise and Draco sitting with Harry and Theodore. He gave them a stern glance to show them that this wasn't a pleasant visit.

"You will have to do without them today, boys," Severus said sombrelly. "I am afraid that an inevitable matter has come up which requires both Draco and Blaise' presence."

Draco stood and pointedly glared at a grumbling Blaise. The darker boy shut up immediately and followed his friend and Professor out. Harry and Theodore exchanged a look of worry. They could tell that whatever Severus had in store for the two boys was not pleasant. Still, they could not do anything about it.

Theodore hummed dejectedly and stood. "Well it's no use staying here then. We might as well go do something productive like practice."

Harry nodded, understanding what Theo was trying to say. While Blaise and Draco were gone, they could still find an empty room and practice their wand-work for the spell to make their wands untraceable. None of the other Slytherins noticed the two boys leave.

Harry and Theo wandered through the dungeon hallways in search of an empty room. They had traveled rather deep into the musty, cold, damp dungeons when they heard a muffled scream from one of the

rooms. Theodore furrowed his brows and looked at Harry. They nodded decisively and pressed their ears against the door.

“Bletchley,” a voice groaned. “This is for your spot on the Quidditch team, is that the best you can do?”

Theodore’s eyebrows shot up. “That sounds like Flint.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “What the hell are they doing?”

Another scream, more guttural than the last, assaulted their ears.

Harry and Theo jumped. That was a rather bad move on their part, as the door shifted and swung open revealing a most horrendous sight. Harry and Theo stared, traumatized. Marcus Flint sat a chair looking surprised but relaxed. It wouldn’t have been that odd if it stopped there and their eyes hadn’t traveled downward to where Miles Bletchley’s head was. Neither male seemed to care that Harry and Theo were gawking at them in what looked like horror. Flint rolled his eyes, *stupid second years*.

“Oi, keep your mouths shut about this and I won’t pummel you in,” Flint growled, baring his teeth.

Harry and Theo nodded quickly and backed out of the room.

“Shut the door!” bellowed Flint as they tried to run as far as they could from the room.

Theo quickly shut the door with a resounding bang. Harry grabbed his hand and they sped off in the opposite direction towards the Slytherin common rooms. For the first time ever they did not care about being discreet and tore through the Slytherin common room, ignoring the looks sent their way, and into Draco and Harry’s room. They collapsed on Harry’s bed and fought to regain their breath.

“What...the hell...just happened?” Theodore panted.

“I don’t think I want to know,” Harry whispered.

Their flushed faces darkened when they remembered the scene. "What were they doing?"

Harry didn't say anything. He sat up and looked at Theodore questioningly. "I don't know how they can do that. I haven't even kissed a girl let alone a boy!"

Well technically he hadn't. Tom had kissed him only in his dreams, that didn't count as a real kiss, did it? Harry inwardly shook his head to clear his thoughts.

Theo nodded. "I've kissed a girl once but it was only a polite kiss at a ball. She was the dance partner my parents had set for me." Theodore looked up at the ceiling. "Kissing a girl isn't too bad; I wonder if it is the same kissing a boy?"

Brown eyes swiveled downwards to look at Harry. Theo sat up slowly and cleared his throat nervously. "Do you want to try it? You know, just to see what's so special about it. I mean you've never kissed anyone so you can lose your first kiss and I can see what it is like to kiss a boy."

Harry stared hard at him for a moment before nodding hesitantly. "All right."

"Okay."

Theo leaned forward slowly and carefully pressed his lips against Harry's. Both boys gasped at the pressure and warmth of each other's skin. Theodore pulled back quickly and blushed. Harry stared down at the bed sheet and picked at the cloth.

"That was interesting," Theo said. "It's almost like kissing a girl but it felt slightly different. I can't explain it."

Harry bit his lip. "You don't need to explain it."

"Did you like it? I did," Theo murmured, wanting to hide.

Harry smiled. "Yeah, it was...nice?"

"We shouldn't tell Blaise and Draco about this," Theo whispered sadly. He didn't like keeping secrets like this from his friends. "I don't know how they would react."

Harry nodded sharply. "I don't like it but you're right, we can't tell them."

They smiled at each other. "Let's practice that charm in here instead. We'll put extra locks on the door and keep our voices low. I don't think anyone will know," Theodore said, losing his blush.

Harry pulled out his wand and grinned. "All right, let's get this before Blaise and Draco. We'll have something over them this way and it'll be easier to blackmail them during the summer as well."

Theodore let out an evil chuckle. "I can't wait."

"Dumbledore has an inkling that the two of you know something about that mangy cat's death. He has put pressure upon me to perform Legilimency on you both because of your earlier arrival at the scene of the crime. I am obligated to do this and believe me when I say that I have no wishes to infiltrate your mind," Severus quickly explained.

Draco and Blaise were looking like death had swarmed over. Their faces were pale and their eyes dull. Legilimency on a child was dangerous. They did not have to worry about that because Severus was skilled at the art and would never let anything happen to them. But the mere thought that someone was going to look into their minds was not something to be fond of.

"Draco, your father will be arriving shortly to witness the event. Dumbledore does not like it but he has no choice as it is the only way I will cooperate. Lucius will have that old coot fired should anything go amiss. The downside to this all is that whatever I see in your minds regarding the incident will be reported to the headmaster." Severus

lowered his voice. "I will keep any unnecessary information to myself."

Lucius entered the room and sent a tiny smile at his son. "This is most unreasonable of the headmaster," Lucius drawled, eyes glinting with malice. "The governors do not quite agree however and are ignoring the matter entirely. It is most unfortunate but you must endure this invasion of your privacy, Draco."

"Any volunteers as to who goes first?" Lucius asked dryly.

Draco resisted the urge to glare at his father. It was quite obvious that Lucius was volunteering his son to go first. *Stupid pureblood etiquette*, Draco thought. He looked at Severus determinedly. The potions master smiled wanly and sat down directly across from the boy. He gave Draco no chance to prepare and dove straight into his memories as painlessly as he could.

Draco's shoulders stiffened as he fought not to push Severus from his mind. Severus had invaded his deeper memories now and had found the scene he was looking for. Disapproval flared through Draco's mind when Severus watched the scene. He pulled out sharply causing his best friend's son some discomfort.

"I suppose I will not need to look into Blaise's mind as he will have the same memory," Severus said in relief, despite his paler than normal face. His lips thinned as he looked at his students. "It would have been wiser had you told me that you heard a voice. I must inform the headmaster of this, much to my displeasure. Do not worry. I will not give him specific details as there hardly are any. But, he will be informed of the Chamber of Secrets being opened."

Lucius froze. "The Chamber of Secrets?"

Severus met his eye and nodded sharply. "Boys you are dismissed. Do not take any detours back to the common room, for I shall know."

Blaise nodded quickly while Draco studied his father's face. The taller boy cuffed his friend lightly and pointedly looked at the door. With an annoyed roll of his eyes, Draco followed his friend out the door,

making sure to shut it behind him. Something fishy was going on and he wanted to know what.

"I will speak with you in a moment. I want to inform the headmaster of my knowledge in case he uses Occlumency. Whatever you have to say to me is most likely something to do with *him*."

Lucius nodded and sat down in an armchair in front of the fire. The dungeons were still as cold as he remembered them.

Severus strode over to his fireplace and withdrew a handful of glittering floo powder. He threw it into the fire and stuck his head in after it. Severus braced himself then clearly shouted out the headmaster's name. The twirling and swirling of the floo left him rather dizzy once his head arrived in the headmaster's fire. Thankfully, Dumbledore was still in there, talking to his phoenix.

"Ah Severus, have done as instructed?" Dumbledore asked calmly, with a smile.

It infuriated the sallow head of Severus Snape. "I have," he bit out. "The boys heard a voice, it was not recognizable. It seems as if the Chamber of Secrets has been opened once again."

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed in shock. "Are you sure, Severus?"

"Quite," he said bitterly.

"Very well then. We shall have a meeting tomorrow with all the teachers to discuss this matter. The students are no longer as safe as I thought. Yes, well, Severus, please inform me if you have any idea as to who opened it this time. Goodnight."

"Headmaster," Severus nodded curtly and sharply pulled his head out of the fire.

He brushed back the hair that had fallen in his face and sat down across from Lucius.

"It is the diary, I presume," Severus said, breaking the silence.

Lucius nodded. "It most likely is. There is a chance that it might be one of the older students, but hearing about the Chamber of Secrets confirms it. Our lord instructed me to send the diary here for a reason. He is planning something large if something has already died. That cat's death was a warning, I'm sure of it."

Severus cracked his knuckles as they started to ache. "We shall have to wait and see. Our lord will not want us meddling in his affairs. I suspect he would have instructed us to assist further if he required it. I will have a talk with the children. It is inevitable that they are being pulled into this. The least we can do is advise them to refrain from taking action. I suspect when the first student dies, they will do what they can to get to the bottom of it all."

Lucius smirked. "They *are* Slytherins, Severus. We will have to reveal our secrets to them during the Yule holidays. Mind barriers can be put on them to prevent Dumbledore from finding anything unusual. It will work until they are old enough to take the potion."

Severus exhaled. "I do not like it, but we have no choice."

"No."

:Dream:

Harry walked down a dark hall, lit with only a few lamps. In front of him were three Death Eaters who were making their way to what seemed like a meeting hall. They spoke in whispers about the upcoming meeting, giving Harry little to no insight about what was about to happen. The three suddenly stopped at a pair of small, shabby looking doors. Some sort of charm had been placed upon the woodwork, Harry noted. The barrier of magic shimmered as they walked through the doors.

Harry surveyed his surroundings with an interested eye. The shabby doors were deceptive and disguising as the inside of the room was enormous and elegant. It was a meeting room for sure. Hell, Harry would be surprised if there weren't charms lining the walls for surveillance! He made his way to the front of room where a large throne sat.

He had an idea as to who would soon be occupying said throne. Harry tucked himself away into a shadow near the throne and waited for the meeting to progress. Whatever Voldemort had to say might not have been as important as he would like to hear but every bit of information helped. Knowing thy enemy would always leave you one step ahead. Harry's attention snapped back to the scene before him ten-fold as the Death Eaters abruptly quieted.

Voldemort was coming.

The Death Eaters fell to their knees in unison, give or take a few, and bowed their heads as Voldemort swept into the room. There was a wide gap left in between the Death Eaters with granted Voldemort an easy path to walk. His face was obscured by a hood but even that did not hide his bright burning crimson eyes. A sibilant hiss escaped from under his hood and a giant snake slithered into the room, trailing after him. Harry guessed that it was a younger Nagini. Together they made an intimidating picture. Harry was almost embarrassed to admit that he was frightened, despite his lack of participation, if it weren't for the fact that he would have been considered an idiot for not fearing Voldemort.

The cloaked lord gracefully sat down on his throne and lowered his hood. Glittering eyes peeked out from behind the masks to look at him. The man sitting on the throne looked only to be 25 or so. The hair at his temples was flawed with an occasional streak of grey and his skin was marked with faint lines of stress. He was by no means attractive but was appealing nonetheless.

His sallow skin, sunken eyes, spindly fingers and thin frame were most deceiving. Harry knew that despite the frail picture he presented, Lord Voldemort was far from weak.

“Raise your heads, my servants.” Even when speaking English, Voldemort still possessed a faint hint of a hiss in his voice. It was unnerving.

The Death Eaters did not stand up but raised their upper bodies so that they were in a somewhat comfortable kneeling position. Their eyes drank up the sight of their lord greedily, their masks doing little to hide their glee.

“Welcome to my humble abode for the time being,” Voldemort said, softly. He raised his hand and gestured to the doors. “I thank you all for arriving on schedule. It is tiring to punish those who are late. Those of you here clearly wish for a new world. A world where magic will rule, where mudbloods and muggles will be used like the cattle they are, and where Dumbledore no longer has power. I, as your lord, will lead to such a world!” He paused as excited applause rang through the room.

“We have been inactive as of yet and I am sure it is disappointing. For those who wish to take action, be cheerful for the time has come. Tonight we shall set an example for the minister. He has ignored our warnings with a foolish amount of arrogance. Tonight we shall broadcast ourselves to the wizarding world! Every witch and wizard will know who we are, every witch and wizard will cringe and fear our name!” Voldemort was standing now, his hands extended in an open gesture.

The Death Eaters had risen to their feet and the raucous was overwhelming. Voldemort did not seem to mind that they had stood and was watching them with calculating eyes. The excitement in the room was palpable and a dangerous gleam of anticipation had blinded them all.

Harry shivered uneasily and bit his lip. He turned sharply to look at the snake as she hissed. Voldemort was listening, but his eyes were still fastened on his followers.

:Impudence is in the air.: hissed Nagini.

:They have yet to learn their place. Mindless followers are ideal for the moment but I will need loyal, competent ones for the future.:

Voldemort replied. :Those who are here will take the path of destruction. From among them there are a few who will rise above the rest, they will be my inner circle.:

Nagini slithered towards her master and coiled at his feet. :Be careful, master. There will be traitors.:

Voldemort did not so much as blink as he admitted:I am eagerly awaiting their revealing.:

:I will be by your side to dispose of them if you wish it of me.:

:It is time.: Voldemort hissed, softly. He looked down briefly, eyes meeting Nagini's.

"Death Eaters," Voldemort said, determinedly. His voice had not risen above his normal tone yet every person in the room heard it. "It is time to take what is rightfully ours."

The horde of black cloaked followers kneeled once again and looked at Voldemort expectantly.

"Malfoy."

Harry's eyes widened. *Malfoy*? If his dates were correct then this was most likely Lucius Malfoy's father.

A tall man stood and bowed. "My lord."

"The instructions I gave you prior to the meeting are to be issued out to every witch and wizard in this room. It is unfortunate, but I have important engagements and will not be able to join you all. The instructions I issued are to be followed down to the last letter. I will be displeased should this mission go awry." He nodded to Malfoy and swept out of the room, Nagini hot on his heels.

The scene changed and Harry found himself staring at an almost deserted street. He would have thought it nothing special if it were not for the peculiar looking house at the end of it. Harry jogged down the dirt road and stopped in front of the house. Harry sucked in a sharp

breath. He had been to this house only once before. It was the Weasley house, they called it the Burrow if he remembered correctly.

The lopsided stack of added rooms was smaller however. *This was how the Burrow looked in the past*, Harry figured. He frowned. Why would Voldemort attack the Weasleys? Harry scrunched up his brow and thought back to what he had read in The History of Dark Arts. The Weasleys had been a light-sided family which had declared their leader Albus Dumbledore.

Perhaps Voldemort was going to attack the Weasleys because they were and still are known widely as being on the light side. It would be a big blow to Dumbledore after all, finding every Weasley under his command, dead. Still, Harry could not find it in himself to really care. He was indifferent to this entire deal. This was the past, he could not prevent anything from happening; all he could do was watch. And even so, he was leaning towards Voldemort's side rather than the Weasleys.

Harry was given no more time to simply observe the house and his thoughts. The Death Eaters had arrived. Not all of the Death Eaters were there, only a handful. Harry supposed that whoever lived at the Burrow was probably skilled in dueling, otherwise not as many Death Eaters would be needed.

Harry watched, wondering how they would handle the situation. His answer came soon enough as the Death Eaters set up an anti-apparation barrier then hurtled spell after spell at the house. The noise and destruction alerted the family inside. Within minutes a family of six ran out of the house in their sleepwear, wands at the ready. Two of the members were only children of about 12 years old. The same age as Harry.

The Death Eaters showed them no mercy. They did not hesitate in shouting the most obscene Dark Arts curses. One of them stepped forward, separating themselves from the others. A glimpse of blond hair told Harry that it was Malfoy. The elder Weasleys noticed this too.

"MALFOY! I knew it!" screamed the oldest male, a man of 40.

Malfoy did not hesitate, he brought his wand down in a graceful arc and shouted some of the two most deadly words the Weasleys ever heard. A flash of green light blinded everyone in the area for a moment before receding and revealing two dead children. It looked like the children had huddled together and had both gotten hit by the curse.

The female redheads screamed. Spell after spell flew from both sides until only one Weasley was left, and two Death Eaters had been stunned. The remaining man looked to be only 20 years of age. He looked at the Death Eaters in fear and choked on a sob before casting the strongest shield he knew on himself. Harry watched in amazement as the man managed to run back into the garden of the home and scramble through a bush.

Two of the cloaked beings ran after him, shouting obscenities. They were too late however. The man had disappeared thanks to an emergency portkey. The curses from the two grew louder as they ran back to tell their comrades what had happened. Harry couldn't summon up any sympathy for them as he stared at the two dead children. They had been innocent. The others may have been involved in the war, but those two kids who were the same age as he was, were innocent.

:End Dream:

Harry screamed and clawed at his bed sheets even as his eyes flew open to stare at the canopy. His body was wracking with pain. It felt as if his joints had been stretched to the point of breaking then crushed together. His limbs shook and he thanked Merlin that he had brewed potions for the pain. Ever so slowly, Harry climbed out of his bed and crawled over to his trunk. He downed the correct potion and slumped over the ornate wood. His breathing was ragged and his mind was fogged.

He hadn't even realized that Draco had been woken by his screams. He had not realized that Draco had watched his every move up to the potion. And he still did not realize that his best friend would be demanding an explanation within seconds.

Draco slipped out of his bed and walked up behind Harry. He made to rest his hand on his friend's shoulder but pulled it back hesitantly. Draco steeled his eyes and let his hand shoot forward to grip Harry's shoulder.

"What was that?" he asked, emotionlessly.

Harry's head shot up as he turned to stare at Draco in horror. "Oh no."

"You've got some explaining to do, Harry Potter." Draco's voice was low and dangerous.

Harry bit his lip and closed his trunk. He turned his eyes away from the angry boy and crawled back into bed.

"I had a nightmare," he offered, weakly.

"I know that you bloody imbecile," Draco snapped. He stopped and took a deep breath. "Sorry. That was unnecessary, I shouldn't say such things until they have been proven. Fortunately, it looks like they'll be proven very, very soon."

Harry winced. He glared at Draco, but barely managed to keep up his stare. "Look, I just had a nightmare. It was nothing spectacular."

"What was the potion for?"

Shit.

"I wasn't feeling very well, it's just a modified version of the pepper-up potion."

"Liar."

"Draco, please don't."

"What did you dream about?" Draco asked, suddenly changing the direction his questions were headed.

Harry saw no harm in telling the boy as he already knew his secret. "I was dreaming of Voldemort's past."

Draco flinched. "I have got to get used to that. Anyway, elaborate please. I won't even try to ask how you can dream of his past. It's something I feel I won't understand much less retain."

Harry chuckled slightly at that. He frowned slightly. "I dreamt of the night when the Malfoy and Weasley feud began."

"The murder?" Draco asked, concerned.

"Yes. Your grandfather killed two of their children. He was identified by them. One of the Weasley men got away and the hatred built up between the families." Harry rubbed his eyes as sleep tugged them down wearily.

Draco noticed and sighed. He slid into the bed and wrapped his arms around Harry. "It's only fair that I be here for you when you were there for me," Draco explained.

Harry smiled. "Thanks. I was disturbed by the deaths of the kids. They were about our age you know. The adults had a reason to die...but the children were innocent."

Draco closed his eyes and fought off the pain that came with the Malfoy name. His own flesh and blood had done such a heinous deed. It upset him just as much that innocent children had been killed for simply being there. He had never forgiven his grandfather and was glad that the man had died before he had been born.

"Go to sleep, Harry. I'll be here in case you have another nightmare. Tomorrow you can tell me all about the potion."

Harry groaned. "I'll get it over with now then if you please."

"Thank you."

"I brewed the potions for myself because when I get out of those odd nightmares my body is in pain. It was more convenient to have them at hand rather than having to suffer through the pain until it went away," Harry explained with a yawn.

Draco's lips thinned. "We'll figure out something about your nightmares. There must be something we can do to stop or reduce the pain. For now let's just go to sleep. I really don't think I can take much more of these shocking events."

Harry snored lightly, making Draco bite back a chuckle. "Goodnight."

Chapter 10

Secrets and Fears

“The Chamber of Secrets?” exclaimed the teachers of Hogwarts.

“It does exist, or at least a version of Slytherin’s infamous chamber exists,” Dumbledore said. “Severus and I have discovered that there was a message left by the perpetrator regarding the Chamber of Secrets being opened once again. 50 years ago, this event also occurred. The chamber was not found then and perhaps we may not find it now but I would greatly appreciate it if you search for odd passages or messages which have been left by the students. It is not certain, but 50 years ago it was a student who opened the chamber. I suspect that this year it is the same.”

“Albus, how can a child open the Chamber of Secrets? According to the tale, there is supposed to be a monster which protects it,” Flitwick reasoned.

Dumbledore turned sad eyes on him. “That is the reason why we must get to the bottom of this immediately.”

“What about the students?” Vector questioned.

“There might be an attack,” McGonagall said with a frown.

Dumbledore nodded. “The students will be guarded and I shall set a curfew for them. If you all would, please escort them to and from each of your classes. I want no accidents or injuries occurring.”

The teachers nodded and sank into a thoughtful silence.

“Harry, look at this,” Draco said, beckoning his friend over.

Harry walked up behind Draco and leaned over his shoulder to read the page indicated.

The Chamber of Secrets

The Chamber of Secrets is a legendary room which resides in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It was said to have been built by Salazar Slytherin for the reason of housing a monster which would continue his noble work. The noble work referred to means that the monster would remove all Muggle-borns and impure students within the school. It's soul purpose is to rid the school of non-pureblood students.

"Interesting," Harry murmured, eyes travelling downward to read further.

According to the legend, Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor argued quite frequently. When the school was being built they had fought especially on the topic of allowing Muggle-born students into Hogwarts. From what information that can be attained, Gryffindor apparently won. Slytherin, furious, left the school, but not before building the Chamber of Secrets. After many centuries of searching for the Chamber and failing, witches and wizards have claimed it to be nothing more than a legend.

"This really doesn't tell us much more than what we already knew but at least we're sure about there being a monster," Draco surmised.

"We're one step closer," Harry agreed, smiling at the boy.

Blaise bit the inside of his cheek to prevent himself from saying something stupid. Currently, he and Theodore were hiding in a closet, listening to the older years discuss Mrs. Norris' death. They were throwing around ideas of what might have happened and what could have killed her. So far nothing interesting had come up and Blaise found himself becoming bored.

Theo sensed the tenseness in his friend and gripped his arm tightly in warning. His eyes flashed as Blaise let out an annoyed sigh. Their irritation might have led to their downfall in the art of eavesdropping had it not been for the latest comment made among the students.

"Maybe, this has to do with the Chamber of Secrets," whispered Bletchley.

Everyone quieted. Theodore blushed faintly when he remembered what he had seen with Harry but stood still. Blaise had now forgotten about Theo's death grip on his arm and stared at the closet door in anticipation.

"The Chamber of Secrets? What gave you that idea?" questioned Terence Higgs.

"My father told me what happened 50 years ago when the chamber was opened," Bletchley explained. "It seems like the same thing is going to happen again. Not to mention I overheard McGonagall whisper something to Flitwick about the Chamber earlier today."

"Should we write home about this? I can tell it is not one of the Slytherins who have opened the Chamber," Higgs asked for everyone.

"No. Whoever is doing this has ties to a Slytherin. None of the other houses know much about the Chamber let alone what happened 50 years ago. If something happens then we'll report to our parents. At the moment we do not have enough evidence to assume that we really are dealing with Slytherin's monster."

Theodore dropped his hand from Blaise's arm and sucked in a sharp breath. He had forgotten about Slytherin's monster. From the slight shiver next to his, Theo guessed that Blaise had as well. They would take the advice of the older Slytherins however. It seemed to be the most logical reasoning so far.

"From my observation of last year, I have come to the conclusion that you boys have once again found many clues as to what we are dealing with this year," Severus said, tonelessly.

"Well, now that you've admitted that we can be of some help, how about giving us some more information?" Blaise grinned cheekily.

"Why don't you start first," Severus deadpanned.

Blaise frowned. It was obvious Severus knew exactly what they were trying to do. Draco and Theodore rolled their eyes at Blaise and Harry recited everything they knew about the Chamber of Secrets, including what he knew about the monster. The next bit of information would be difficult to explain unless Harry revealed his source of information. Sighing, he looked at Draco for help. The blond nodded encouragingly.

"Slytherin's monster is a snake," Harry explained.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. "Stereotyping the monster simply because his house's symbol is a snake is rather dim of you, Harry."

The boy looked hurt for a moment before his eyes froze over. "I am beyond stereotyping, Severus. I have a source which was there at the scene of the crime," Harry explained. He lifted the sleeve of his robes to reveal Aeni.

Severus looked at her in shock. "How long have you known?"

"Quite a while actually. Blaise, Theo and Draco already knew and they're fine with it. Before you ask, no I did not open the Chamber of Secrets nor did I release the monster on the school. I am indeed a Parselmouth," Harry said quickly.

Severus frowned. "Is the snake trustworthy?"

Harry nodded. "I believe she is. Her name is Aeni, by the way. She was there before the students and told me she heard hissing. It is obvious that the monster is a snake of some sort. We aren't exactly sure which type of snake it is but I believe it to be a rather large one.

What I'm unsure about is how a snake that large would get through the school. It seems absurd."

Severus nodded and held out his hand to examine the snake. She with a few prodding hisses from Harry, reluctantly slithered into Severus' palm. He examined her this way and that before prying open her mouth to look at her fangs. Every movement was gentle but Aeni found herself frightened.

:Fear in me for this one.: she hissed, attempting to slither away from Severus who held her still.

Harry blinked. How odd, even snakes feared Severus. He cracked a grin and took her back from a satisfied Severus.

"I will not need to examine her further thankfully. I do not have the time to do so." Severus sat down and glared at his floor.

"I must ask you boys to not go looking into this matter. It is dangerous, much more dangerous than last year. Investigate further if you will but do not take action and pry into matters which are dangerous. The most you should look into this will be restricted to textbooks and information from the other Professors." Severus transferred his glare at them. "I am serious. If I find that you have been delving in matters which do not concern you, I will see to it that you are expelled."

Draco, Blaise and Theodore gaped. Was he for real? Would he really have them expelled?

Harry, on the other hand, paled drastically and stood. He bit his lip and looked at Severus sadly. "I will restrict my research to books, Professor. I can't afford to be expelled." He turned sharply and left the room, leaving four subdued people behind.

Jamie yawned and resisted the urge to glare at Lockhart. At first, he had seemed like the most interesting person in the world not to mention handsome. But unfortunately, all good things must come to

an end and the brilliant shine upon Lockhart did as well. Jamie had agreed to having a talk with the man when he had asked ever so politely after class. She had been thrilled, as had the other females in her year.

Right now however, Jamie found herself wishing to be anywhere but there. Lockhart was obviously pulling a scam. He was boring, arrogant and rude. Not to mention he put Jamie's publicity behind his own! She was the girl-who-lived! How dare he compare himself to her!

Her hazel eyes rolled upwards as he began to prattle on about the many awards he had won. She couldn't help but feel bitter resentment towards Harry at the moment. He would probably be one of those students who thought she's love comparing with Lockhart. Stupid brat. He didn't understand that she was much higher up than Lockhart ever would be.

The blond ponce was rubbish at everything he did except lying. Jamie had had about enough. She stood abruptly and put on a polite smile. "Excuse me, Professor. I really must be going. I must get my beauty sleep, not that I need it."

Lockhart stood and kissed the back of her before ushering out the door. "Yes, yes, of course my dear. We celebrities must look our best at the least and exceed our best daily!"

She didn't bother responded and haughtily stalked off towards the Gryffindor common room. Normally she would have an escort in case there were any dangers but for once Jamie had refused to take someone with her. Her mind was being suffocated by the presence of others and their constant nattering was getting annoying.

Jamie sighed faintly. That was how the life of the popular went.

"Have you heard?" Blaise casually reclined on his bed, and stared at his friends. "Nearly Headless Nick is having a death day party. Well,

that's what the Bloody Baron told the Slytherins in the common room. He said we should avoid it or we'll be planning to celebrate our own."

Theodore paled but did not say anything. Harry and Draco looked at him in concern. Blaise didn't seem affected by it and continued talking about how ghosts had the oddest rituals. He didn't notice that the more he talked, the more colour faded from Theo's cheeks.

"Blaise," Harry said sharply. "Stop it. We don't want to hear anymore, it's getting boring."

Blaise looked at Harry incredulously but dropped the subject. He stood and stretched. "It's almost time for the feast, shall we slowly make our way to the Great Hall?"

Draco nodded and stood, pulling Harry up with him. "Let's go."

The hallways were filling up with more students as the quartet made their way into the Great Hall. They found their seats quickly and sat down with Blaise and Theo sitting across from Harry and Draco. Everything went off without a hitch this time. Dumbledore stood and gave another unusual speech with a minute of silence of Mrs. Norris. They had fallen silent, but only for the sake of their status. Blaise had had to contain his mirth when Filch had started sobbing uncontrollably. Once the silence had ended, food had appeared on the table and Blaise sighed in relief.

He grinned at his friends as he piled food into his plate. "Imagine if his batty cat came back as ghost. I wonder whether he would die of shock or whether he would start bawling again."

"That's not funny, Blaise," Theodore said, stoically.

"Of course it is! I mean a ghost can't really harm us all that much, especially a cat's ghost. It's almost idiotic to be frightened of ghosts."

Theodore slammed his knife down and seized Blaise' collar. "Shut your mouth."

He released his friend's collar and resumed eating. Blaise was befuddled. He stared at Theo in shock before glare venomously. He

too resumed eating and dinner between them became a terse affair. Harry and Draco ignored them and continued with their conversation.

Draco purposely went out of his way to joke around with Harry. He wanted the other boy to have fun that night, and he especially wanted him to laugh. Draco's plan was succeeding luckily, and Harry was flushed with joy. By the time they had finished their meal, they had pretty much forgotten about Blaise and Theodore even being there. Harry grinned as Draco threw an arm around his shoulders and led him out of the hall, Blaise and Theo trekking ahead, sullenly. They had left the feast early to avoid having to push through the horde of students which would soon be crowding the hallways.

Harry and Draco stood close together and laughed at the jokes between them. Blaise and Theodore were now walking on either side of them, still not speaking to each other at all. The two in the middle weren't worried however, it would not be long before Blaise apologized and all was right again. Their fighting was beginning to become a routine.

Just as they turned a corner, Moaning Myrtle, a ghost who haunted the girl's toilet, swept past them. Theo yelped and shivered. His face had gone pasty and his joints had stiffened. Realization dawned through the other three.

"You're afraid of ghosts?" Draco looked at Harry then at Theodore. His voice was not mocking, but curious. Harry looked concerned and Blaise looked amused.

Theo relaxed slightly and blushed. "Yes. Go ahead and laugh, Blaise. I can see that you want to."

Blaise grinned. "I'm not laughing at the fact you're scared of ghosts but more at the fact that you thought we would taunt you for it. Besides everyone has a fear."

Theodore glared. "Shut up." He looked seriously angry. "I'd rather you didn't speak to me anymore today."

Blaise frowned and crossed his arms. "I'm sorry, all right. You've been a downright prat though. You could have just told me and I would have understood!"

Theo sneered. "Merlin forbid, Blaise Zabini trying to understand."

Harry scowled. "That was uncalled for, Theo."

Brown and green eyes met in a fierce battle. Draco and Blaise stared at them in confusion. After a minute or so, Theo broke the staring contest and looked at Blaise.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," he said genuinely.

Blaise smiled crookedly. "I'll forgive you only if you do my Charms essay," he joked.

Theodore punched his arm lightly. "Arse."

Blaise arched a brow and looked at a smiling Harry and Draco. "What're you two happy about?"

"We aren't happy, we're smug," Draco corrected. Harry laughed and nodded in agreement. "It was obvious you two weren't going to argue for long. I suppose in a instance like this one a girl would say, you two are like an old married couple."

Harry was glad he was seeker as he dodged a particularly vicious swing from Blaise. He laughed again and nearly stopped when he heard a hissing from the wall.

:I smell the blood of a speaker.: it hissed. :No matter. Master has commanded me to kill.: The voice got fainter but Harry caught the last few words. :...fresh blood to kill.:

He acted as if nothing was wrong but was sure that Draco caught him. "We should head back to the dorm. It's not a good idea to linger in the hallways especially when there's a death day party going on." He looked pointedly at Theo who flashed him a thankful smile. They hurried back to their dorm and retired to their respective rooms.

Harry woke up with a start as a loud bang from the common room reached his ears. Draco was already on his feet, wand in hand. He pulled a sleepy Harry out of bed and tugged the smaller boy into his side. They had their wands in hand as they inched towards the common room. Other Slytherins were seen doing the same until one of the older years called out that it was Professor Snape.

Harry let out a breath and smiled at Draco who had attempted to protect him. The blond blushed when he realized what he had done but smiled back regardless. From behind them, Blaise and Theodore pushed them forward into the common room where an impatient Severus Snape waited.

“Stop your dawdling. This is an important matter,” he snapped.

Immediately, every last one of the Slytherins gathered around him, eager for news. Severus refrained from rolling his eyes. It was obvious that once an important piece of gossip or news came out, every Slytherin would make sure to know exactly what it was. Draco, Blaise, Theodore and Harry were no exceptions.

“A student has been found petrified,” Severus said, tonelessly. “I expect you to keep your comments regarding the student to yourself. The Professors are investigating for the culprit, do not involve yourselves in this. Should I see a single student of Slytherin house prying into the affair, I shall make sure that they will be suspended.”

The Slytherins nodded to assure their head of house they would not be so stupid.

“Who was the student, sir?” Draco’s brow was slightly creased, his face mostly masked except for a tiny bit of confusion in his eyes.

“Colin Creevey of Gryffindor,” Severus responded, lips curled in a sneer.

Harry's eyes widened. He ducked his head to hide his horror. He had an inkling about which type of serpent the monster was but needed more data. Judging from Draco's clenched fists, he too had figured it out. They exchanged a quick look before turning blank eyes to Severus' rigid figure.

"Measures will be taken to ensure the safety of the students. It will be necessary for the students of Slytherin especially to remain alert. The other houses shall put their blame upon you all for this because of our dubious history." He looked at the seventh years severely. "You will be responsible for keeping the younger years safe. I want no accidents, understood?"

They nodded sharply and looked at each other. Harry guessed that they would be planning routes to take and safer passages for the younger years. Hopefully the smarter seventh years would teach the younger years a few spells to protect themselves as well.

"That will be all for now," Severus said, dismissingly. He spun around, cloak billowing, and left for his own room.

The students trickled back to their rooms, staying behind for a few minutes to talk with their peers. Harry and Draco did not stay to talk to Blaise and Theodore. They ran back to their room. Harry threw open the lid of his trunk and pulled out a borrowed copy of Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them. Draco yanked it out of his hands and flipped it to the page they were looking for.

Harry at this point did not care that Draco had been rude, he had gotten to the correct page faster than Harry could have anyways. Harry sat down next to Draco and read the page a few times to memorize the information.

Basilisk (King of Serpents)

M.O.M Classification: XXXXX

...

The Basilisk is a brilliant green serpent that may reach up to fifty feet in length. The male has a scarlet plume upon its head. It has

exceptionally venomous fangs but its most dangerous means of attack is the gaze of its large yellow eyes. Anyone looking into these eyes directly will suffer instant death.

Basilisks have been known to survive for as long as 900 years. They are born from a chicken's egg, hatched beneath a toad. Spiders flee from the Basilisk for they are mortal enemies. The Basilisk flees from the crowing of a rooster because the cry is fatal to it.

...

"It seems to fit," Harry whispered, voice thick with trepidation.

"Not everything," Draco pointed out. "Creevey was petrified, not killed. How did that happen?"

"He's always carrying around a camera," Harry stated.

"He could have seen the Basilisk through the camera. Because they didn't have direct eye contact, the gaze probably petrified him instead of killing him," Draco reasoned, understanding the point Harry was making.

"Exactly."

Harry groaned. "You do realize that we'll have to keep this a secret from Blaise and Theo."

"Yeah, it's just like last year all over again. We'll eventually tell them so they won't be too angry with us," Draco quipped, earning a smile out of Harry. "Don't worry so much about it." He opened the door and let a small expression of annoyance to cross his face. "I'll have to go tell Blaise and Theodore that you weren't feeling too well otherwise they'll hound us into the night."

He shut the door softly behind him, giving Harry the privacy he needed. Harry picked up his sleepy snake and quickly roused her with a few strokes. She bared her fangs and hissed.

:I am sorry, but I must speak with you.: Harry said quickly, trying to soothe the aggravated snake.

:What is it: Aeni slithered off of his arm and made herself comfortable in front of his legs.

:The serpent you heard might be a Basilisk.:

Her head jerked towards him in surprise. :A Basilisk. I have not heard of this serpent other than it is large and fearsome.:

:It is the king of serpents.: Harry explained. :You must avoid its gaze because its eyes will kill you if you look into them. It also has poisonous fangs and is rumoured to be extremely large, up to fifty feet.:

Aeni shrank slightly. :It is fearsome indeed. I feel the quake the spiders feel.:

:Spiders: Harry looked at her, eyebrow arched.

:Nevermind, speaker. You are of not animal instincts.: Aeni increased slightly in size and gave him what could be described as a haughty look.

Harry gave up. He didn't understand what she meant by the spiders but it did not seem very important. It also looked like Aeni wasn't willing to speak any longer, she had coiled up tightly and resumed sleeping. Harry sent her a disgusted frown but did not wake her.

He had a lot to think about.

Chapter 11

The Tears That Befall Us

"Tom," Ginny whispered, frantically searching for her diary. She felt a sudden urge, no, a need, to write in it.

Her eager hand pulled it out from the dark confines of her trunk and flipped it open. Mind not clear on what she was doing, Ginny began writing about her day and how much hope she had for Harry and herself. For the first time in a while, Harry had actually acknowledged her. Whether it had been a good confrontation however, was still debateable.

Flashback

Ginny turned the corner of the hallway, her eyes glued to a note her mother had penned her. A smile lit up her haggard face as she read the contents. Things were looking up for her father it seemed. She did not realize that someone else was there until she crashed right into them.

"Oof!" Ginny fell to the ground, note fluttering from her fingertips. "I'm sorry," she said quickly, looking up at the person.

Harry looked down at her with an annoyed expression and removed himself from Draco's arms. The taller boy had caught him before he could fall.

"Watch where you're going next time," Harry said, irritated at the contact. He bent down and picked up her letter then handed it to her.

Draco sneered at her and led Harry away. Their heads were bent low and they started whispering quickly to each other. It was evident that they were planning something. Ginny did not care though. Her mind was preoccupied with much more important issues. Like how she had touched Harry, and he had given her the letter back.

The first year girl stood up and with a, barely concealed, squeal of joy ran back to her dormitory. She had to tell someone what happened!

Jamie would not be interested neither would Hermione. And her brother, Ron, was out of the question. This only left one per...thing: Tom.

End Flashback

Elegant script scrawled its way across the parchment. *Relax your mind and body, Ginny. Assessing the situation will be easier once you have done so.*

The tension was already easing out of Ginny as she breathed deeply and tried to forget about Harry. As she calmed, her mind slowly started misting over until she could not think at all. Ginny never noticed this; her eyes were unfocussed and wide. It was almost as if she had been kissed by an ever perilous Dementor. A small slip of drool rolled past her lips and fell onto a page of the diary.

A small eerie chuckle rose out of the book. *Good girl.* A grey mist, thicker than normal, emerged from the page and enfolded itself around Ginny who twitched slightly as she felt her body be invaded by an unseen force. This new intruder took over her senses and control. Ginny's eyelids fell down to cover her eyes.

A few seconds passed where all was silent yet everything was stirred. The usual brilliant blue eyes flickered open to reveal crimson orbs. In odd irony, from her locks of red hair to the dainty freckles over her nose, the eyes seemed to suit her. She was no longer Ginevra Weasley. No, this new person was anything but the kind, love struck girl. This new person, thing, was Tom Marvolo Riddle, and he would make good use of Ginny's body.

He rose from her bed and experimentally walked around the room, getting used to the unfamiliar body. Once every sense had settled, every nerve had calmed, Tom carefully hid the diary in his robes and left the dormitory. No one noticed the change in Ginny, nor did they care to ask about her eyes had they seen them. It was almost too easy.

Tom started for the girls lavatory. Ginny was weak at the moment, which meant he would have more time in her body. Now was the time to start his plan. He needed to go down to the Chamber of Secrets to

accomplish the first procedure. With any luck, Tom might even have time to visit the Chamber's basilisk.

On the way there however, a pair of boys distracted him from his journey. They stood close together, huddled in the fashion that they were speaking to each other secretly. Tom paused and watched closely as a black haired, green eyed boy quickly whispered something to a platinum blond, grey eyed boy.

"I've successfully mastered the spell to remove the tracers on our wands," Harry said softly. "With all the events of last year I know we forgot to practice, but it did not take too long this year. Hopefully I can perform it soon so that we don't need to worry about the Yule holidays."

Draco inclined his head minutely. "I've been able to perform it twice without messing up. I think we're okay as far as the spell goes. Let's get Blaise and Theo so we can perform it tonight."

As hard as Tom tried, he could no make out what they were saying. Ginny's capabilities were not up to par and so he didn't dare try an eavesdropping charm. Instead, he stood silently and watched. Something about the ebony haired boy made his mind uneasy. It was as if he knew him. The other boy, the blondie, he reminded Tom very much of Lucius.

Probably Lucius' son, Tom thought.

One might think it was odd that Tom, although only a memory of his 16-year-old self, knew what happened in the future. It had to do with his diary. When the diary was created, Tom had made sure to put spells on it to track the changes in his life until he died. Since he had yet to die, Tom obviously remembered everything that had happened.

These two boys were a part of his memory that was somehow blurred. He should have remembered them, for the niggling sensation in the back of his mind was enough to tell Tom that they had met before.

Someone, or something, was blocking his memories. It vexed Tom that it was possible, even when he was not in his own body or diary.

“Soon,” Tom whispered, his voice high and feminine. “I will know who you are.”

Draco looked away from Harry and caught sight of Tom. He sneered and walked up to him. “It’s not polite to spy on people, Weasley.”

Harry came up beside him and glared. “Watch your back, Weasley. We won’t be lenient if there is a next time.” He tugged Draco’s arm. “Let’s go.”

Tom nodded fervently to play the part of a stuttering, lovesick girl and rushed off towards his original destination. The room was empty when he arrived. Making good use of the vacated area, Tom crouched down and peered up at a delicately carved snake on the broken tap. He pressed his fingers against the snake and whispered a few choice words in Parseltongue.

The snake went from a rustic bronze to gleaming silver. Tom smirked to himself. *Now that the Chamber’s entrance is active, there will be no stopping me.*

He sat down next to a cubicle and relaxed. Slowly, he withdrew his presence from Ginny’s mind back to the diary. Bit by bit, Ginny regained her senses and started to panic. What had she done this time? The diary! It had been confirmed in her eyes that the diary was the reason why she had woken in Myrtle’s bathroom.

Ginny tugged at her hair and flung the diary into a toilet and flushed it repeatedly. It swirled out of sight showing no repelling of water. A haggard gasp of relief clawed its way out of her as she sagged against the cubicle’s door.

“No more. Please, be the reason. Please,” Ginny begged. “Tom, I’ll miss you. Tom, I can’t let you take control of me at a time like this.”

Her scarlet hair flew behind her as the girl raced through Hogwarts until she was curled up on her bed. Shaky sobs shook her frame. Ginny turned onto her back and whimpered when she felt something

poke her back. Still shaking, Ginny reached underneath her blanket and closed her hands around a book. Horror stricken, she pulled out the book and screamed.

The others who had heard the scream knew nothing of the reason why as Ginny ran out of the dormitory before they could question her. Later when asked, they would admit to Professor McGonagall that they did see a diary of some sort lying on her bed.

Inside the diary, Tom decided that his container was weakening, as was his clutch on her.

Ginny sat nervously in front of Professor McGonagall's desk, twiddling her thumbs. "I'm not lying, Professor. I swear that everything I've told you is true."

McGonagall peered over her glasses and sternly pursed her lips. "I find it difficult to believe that you find yourself in danger because of writing in a diary."

"It's not just that, Professor," Ginny mumbled. "I tried to throw it away because I woke up in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom without ever going there but when I got back to my room, it was on my bed."

"Ms. Weasley, please retrieve the diary immediately and I shall have it examined." McGonagall stood and led the girl to the door. "Perhaps afterward, you can tell me how you acquired such a thing."

Ginny blushed and ran off. It took almost 10 minutes before she came back, diary in hand. McGonagall took it from her and closely scrutinized it. "You may go, Ms. Weasley. I will bring this back to you should there be nothing wrong with it."

As soon as Ginny left, McGonagall closed her door and set the diary on her desk. She levelled her wand at the book, a spell on her lips. Before anything could happen, a pale green light shot out from the spine of the diary, hitting McGonagall in the forehead. Her eyes went blank as her wand dropped to the floor.

Moments later, McGonagall opened her eyes and found herself sitting rigidly in her chair, wand firmly tucked away in her sleeve. Her puzzled mind dismissed the fact that she could not recall what happened prior to waking and resumed marking homework.

The diary was nowhere to be seen.

Soft scraping sounds filtered through the halls, unheard and their owner, unseen. Hissing escaped it but nobody was around to hear it. Nobody was around to see the danger that plagued the school. The basilisk could practically feel fresh blood as she slithered further into the school. A boy! There was a boy approaching! Quickly, the basilisk stilled its movements and waited. It would not be long before she dined. The last boy had frozen. She disliked eating frozen morsels of food. This time it would be different however. This time, she would not look into his eyes. This time, she would feast!

The boy entered the hall she was in and froze. The scent of the sludge from the pipes had dirtied her beautiful scales and given her a pungent scent. *No matter*, she thought. *It is too late for him to flee.*

The basilisk surged forward, jaws open in preparation. The boy turned at the noise and looked directly at a window.

NO!

But it was too late; the boy had seen her eyes through the reflection. His body stiffened and turned obscenely pale as it fell forward to lie, unmoving, on the ground.

Angry hisses filled the hallway, deafeningly. Infuriated, the basilisk retreated. She knew more humans would arrive. There would be too many for her to handle and if her body were hurt in anyway, master would be disappointed. Just as she left, the faint murmur of voices drew nearer.

“Albus?” Professor McGonagall stopped and glared at the wizard. “The minister himself has sent you a letter. The least you could do is open it!”

“All in good time, Minerva.” Dumbledore continued walking, eyes sparkling in amusement.

McGonagall huffed but hurried to walk at his side once again. She did not have to as Dumbledore had stopped. His posture was rigid and soon McGonagall could see why. Theodore Nott, a second year Slytherin, had been petrified. The Gryffindor head of house did not care much for Slytherins but this was unacceptable! Something had to be done.

“Security measures must be tightened,” McGonagall whispered, staring at the face of her student.

Dumbledore nodded sharply and levitated the boy. “Come, we will deposit him in the infirmary first. Severus needs to be notified immediately before the students are informed.”

“I shall go fetch Severus instead,” McGonagall offered quickly, hurrying off.

She made haste and swept past the few students who littered the main hallways. They looked at her in bemusement but returned to their conversations without a second thought. McGonagall was fretting the awaiting explosion from Severus. He would not be happy about this. Over the past year, it had become obvious that Harry and Draco Malfoy were his favourite students. It was also evident that Theodore Nott and Blaise Zabini were their best friends.

McGonagall pursed her lips in discomfort and knocked on Severus’ office door. She knew from experience that it would be safer if she extended polite courtesy at the moment rather than barging in. The door opened of its own accord to allow McGonagall entry.

Severus was seated at his desk marking essays. He looked up and scowled. “What is it?”

"There's been an attack." McGonagall wasted no time in getting to the point. "Theodore Nott was petrified."

"WHAT!" Severus roared, standing up. His nostrils flared.

"Calm yourself, Severus!" she snapped. "You aren't helping the boy by getting worked up. Albus has taken him to the infirmary. Our job is to alert the students. I leave the Slytherins to you. Filius and Pomona need to be fire-called but I shall take care of that."

"Security measures must be taken," Severus snapped.

"I've told Albus the same," McGonagall said sourly. "He brushed me off but I assure you we will all be having a meeting very soon."

Severus nodded curtly and stalked out of his office, robes billowing more than ever. McGonagall shook her head in sympathy and left to do her own announcements.

The Slytherins hastily gathered around Severus as he entered the common room. By now they understood that their head of house only had important notices during these dangerous times. Within five minutes all of Slytherin had gathered in the common room. Luckily the dungeons were large so they did not face crowded rooms.

"Another student has been petrified," Severus proclaimed.

Harry, Draco and Blaise looked at each other with a sinking feeling. "Who is it, Professor?" Draco inquired a bit shakily.

Dark, fathomless eyes looked at the three boys, a hint of sympathy in their depths. "Theodore Nott."

Blaise clenched his fists and stormed out of the room. Harry and Draco waited for any further message from Severus but he simply shook his head indicating there was nothing else to say. They ran after their friend, not concerned about the emotion they were showing. Friendship was more important at the moment.

The duo found Blaise lying on his bed, staring listlessly at the canopy. They sat on either side of him and took comfort in each other's presence. Draco sneered at the wall and closed his eyes. Harry grabbed Blaise and Draco's hands. He received identical squeezes of reassurance in return.

Blaise smiled weakly up at him. "He's only petrified. Theo will be back soon enough."

"Why does it hurt then?" Harry whispered, curling up next to the taller boy.

Draco opened his eyes and lay down on his side to face Blaise and Harry. "He's our friend. If it didn't hurt, then we wouldn't be very good friends."

"Slytherins are emotionless, or so the world thinks," Blaise said bitterly.

Harry clenched his hand and scoffed. "Fuck them." His eyes fluttered closed. "I wish we were. Things would be easier."

"All we have are masks," Draco murmured. "What good are they when something like this happens?"

Harry tugged his hand to get his attention. "Let's visit Hagrid."

Draco sat up and scowled. "What for?"

"We need to investigate something," Harry insisted, letting go of his friends' hands. "Come."

He pulled Blaise off of the bed and held onto his shoulders firmly. "Visit Theo. We'll be by later to see him. Right now you won't be any help in your condition. The best thing to do now is to make yourself useful by doing what you can." He smiled faintly. "Watch over Theo, okay?"

Blaise looked at him blankly for a moment but slowly smiled lopsidedly. "Yeah."

They parted their separate ways, intent on using their time wisely.

Knock. Knock. Kno...

The door opened fractionally, revealing Hagrid's bushy beard and beetle like eyes. "Arry!" Hagrid said enthusiastically.

He pulled the door open wide and frowned when he saw Draco. "Malfoy." He nodded to the boy who politely nodded back.

"What can I do fer ya?" Hagrid turned around, kettle in hand. He set around pouring tea into large cups.

"I wanted to ask you about some creatures. I researched them but couldn't find anything except the basic information," Harry explained.

"Well wha' animals would yeh like teh know abou'?" Hagrid sat down with a heavy sigh and drowned half of his cup in a single swig.

Harry looked at Draco meaningfully. *Don't say a word.* "There are two in particular: Acromantulas and basilisks."

"Why would yeh be wanting teh know more about those two?" Hagrid was starting to get suspicious, Harry and Draco noted.

"You should him the reason, Harry," Draco interjected before Harry could speak. His eyes flashed.

Harry froze and arched a brow before understanding what Draco was saying. "Allow me to introduce my familiar." He pulled Aeni out from under his sleeve and set her upon the large table.

Hagrid broke out into a smile. "Beautiful snake yeh got there, 'Arry."

"Thanks." Harry grinned. "I was doing an independent research project on snakes because of her. When I got to the basilisk, I found practically no information at all. As for Acromantula, well I've been

wondering about them for a while since Professor Snape mentioned them to me,” he lied, eyes honest.

“Well teh be honest, ‘Arry, I don’ really know much ‘bout basilisks,” Hagrid admitted. “They’re so rare, it’s hard to find out anything about ‘em.”

“What about Acromantula?” Draco inquired.

“That’s another subject all together!” Hagrid beamed. “I know plenty ‘bout Acromantula. I wish I could have another.” Black eyes widened. “I shouldn’ ‘ave told you that.”

Something clicked in Harry’s mind. “Hagrid. Why were you expelled 50 years ago?”

“Arry. I...” Hagrid looked uneasy. “Come back alone tonight so I can give you a better explanation.”

“It’s all right.” Draco stood abruptly, his face cold. “Just tell him now, I’ll leave. I’d rather not have Harry sneaking about during night, when our best friend was just petrified.”

He smiled briefly at Harry and quickly hurried towards the door.

“Wait, Malfoy.” Hagrid groaned. “You deserve to know too I guess. Nott being your friend and all.” He buried his face in his hands. “I know what yer thinking, but I didn’ do nothing to cause these attacks.”

Harry opened his mouth and closed it. He couldn’t help but believe that Hagrid was not the reason behind these attacks. But at the same time, he knew he had to get the story out of Hagrid. Whatever happened 50 years ago was important.

“I’ll need a pensive,” Hagrid muttered gruffly. “Can’t tell stories and it’d be best if yeh saw it for yerself.”

“Only two people we know have a pensive,” Draco whispered.

Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape, Harry thought despairingly.

Chapter 12

Questioning Innocence

"My Lady, is Severus there?" Harry asked politely.

The portrait swung open and Severus glared down at his student. He had been in the process of completing his monthly potions journal when an interruption had ceased his productivity. Not only had Harry shown up at his rooms, but Draco and Hagrid had as well. What the half-giant was doing there, Severus could not for the life of him figure out. He arched a brow, demanding an explanation.

"Not out here, sir," Draco said hastily. His present company did not want the headmaster knowing of their plans just yet, if ever.

"Very well. You may enter," Severus growled, stepping back to let Harry, Draco and a very surprised Hagrid into his quarters. "There had better be a suitable reason for this."

Harry nodded. "There is."

After explaining to Severus exactly why they had come to him and not Dumbledore did not take too long. By the end of their tale, Draco visibly relaxed. Severus did not look as if he was particularly angry, just annoyed.

"Very well. I will allow you to use my Pensieve on one condition."

Harry smiled slightly. "We agree to let you view the memory as well."

Severus looked at the half-giant enquiringly. Hagrid looked a tad apprehensive but nodded his assent. Severus motioned for them to wait in the living room while he fetched the object. He returned a few minutes later, holding a basin filled with a white cloud-like substance. Harry and Draco had seen one before and from the lack of curiosity on Hagrid's part, guessed that he too had seen one as well.

Shakily, Hagrid raised the pink umbrella he had brought with him to his forehead and extracted the memory they were to observe. A substance, much like the contents of the Pensieve, gathered up at the end of the umbrella before Hagrid carefully lowered it into the basin.

They looked at each other and dipped a finger into the Pensieve. Harry gasped at the feeling of being pulled in and closed his eyes. He only opened them once his feet felt the firm ground. Draco nudged him slightly and pointed to a figure. Emerald eyes grew wide. It was none other than Tom.

All eyes were on the boy as he entered a room forcefully and accused Hagrid of letting loose the monster residing within the Chamber of Secrets. Hagrid shook his head in denial and allowed whatever monster he DID have escape. Before he disappeared out of sight, Harry, Draco and Severus caught the sight of a hairy looking leg.

The memory faded and the quartet found themselves back in the living room. Severus knew exactly who the other boy had been, and who he was now. Harry and Draco did not need to know that bit of information however as it did not concern them yet. Severus picked up his Pensieve, after Hagrid replaced his memory, and replaced it quickly. He could see the two boys coming to their own conclusions and would wait until they disclosed them before correcting any misunderstandings.

Harry fought not to display any form of emotion but was failing slightly. Luckily, no one pressed his reaction. His thoughts were in turmoil as Tom's image swam around in his mind. Hagrid was obviously innocent and Tom was most definitely the perpetrator. He had heard about the Chamber of Secrets from Tom, but the boy had never told him he had such awful motives behind his discovery of it. He didn't know what to think of Tom Riddle anymore.

The monster in the Chamber of Secrets was a basilisk for sure as well, Harry reasoned. Everything had added up, which was also another reason why Hagrid could not have released the monster. He could not speak Parseltongue; the only person other than Harry who

could was Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort. Voldemort was not strong enough to open the Chamber, which only left Tom. Was he still alive? Only 50 years had passed, it was very possible that he was still living and breathing.

Harry let out a small sigh. "From what we saw, we know that Hagrid isn't responsible for this."

Severus looked at Hagrid inexpressively. "The minister has been alerted to your past however. He shall come for you regardless of this evidence."

"Bloody idiot probably wants a scapegoat," Draco muttered, surprising Hagrid. The half-giant never thought that the Malfoy heir would defend him.

A knock sounded at Severus' portrait. Cantankerous about the constant visitors, Severus jerkily opened the portrait and scowled. Dumbledore did not wait for his Potions Master to invite him in, behind him followed Minister Fudge and Lucius Malfoy.

Dumbledore looked at Severus, eyes solemn. "I'm afraid this visit is unfortunate and unpleasant."

Fudge cleared his throat and looked at Hagrid, his face slightly flushed. "I'm afraid that you, Rubeus Hagrid, are to be taken to a ministry holding cell. You are a suspect in the attacks taking place at Hogwarts and the ministry is taking no chances."

Harry and Draco opened their mouths to protest but were immediately silenced by the glare Severus shot them. Fudge looked over at them and frowned.

"Why are there students here?" he asked Snape, distaste colouring his features.

"We were having afternoon tea with Hagrid and he kindly escorted us back to the school because of all the current attacks."

Draco continued where he left off. "Professor Snape wanted to see us because our friend Theodore Nott was petrified just recently. Hagrid offered to see us here instead for our safety."

"I was jus' leavin' when you got here," Hagrid said, scratching his beard.

Dumbledore and Fudge looked at Severus who nodded to confirm their story. Lucius cast a suspicious eye at his friend but did not speak out. Draco and Harry had seen it and were careful not to let on how let down they felt. Lucius seemingly agreed with the minister's view on Hagrid.

Meanwhile, Severus regarded the man carefully and wondered exactly what he was plotting. Nothing was ever as simple as it seemed and Lucius' thoughts were no exception.

"Well, we best get going," Fudge muttered into the tense atmosphere. He started for the door.

Hagrid turned to the boys. "Spiders migh' help your problem."

They looked at him in understanding and nodded their goodbye. It wouldn't be forever, they would make sure of that. He dutifully walked out the door after Fudge, Lucius following him out.

"Care to explain your visit earlier, Lucius?" Severus drawled, sneering.

Lucius flicked his eyes up from his glass of brandy to send Severus his own sneer. "I cannot prevent the minister from acting on his own." He took a sip of the alcohol. "My presence was only a formality; he needed a representative."

Severus said nothing, choosing to pour himself a glass of the liquid instead. "Perhaps it is for the best that he has rid us of that oaf. Draco and Harry have taken an interest and Hagrid's foolishness has only inspired them to look further into the events of the attacks."

“My son is sorely in need to a lecture,” Lucius said tiredly.

Severus smirked nastily. “I give you my condolences, Lucius. The boys are infuriated with you and will hardly wait to be scolded.”

Lucius downed the rest of his brandy. “I must admit that I’m flabbergasted at Draco’s sudden liking toward the half-giant.”

“Hagrid is a good ally,” Severus replied with an approving smile.

“Indeed.” Lucius stood up. “I must be off, Severus.”

They walked to the door together and shook hands. Lucius frowned slightly, eyes glittering with worry. “Do not let the boys get involved. Our lord is planning to murder the end of the year to restore himself in his former body.”

“Who is it that is supposed to die?” Severus inquired, curious but uncaring.

Lucius looked at his long time friend with indifferent eyes. “The person who will restore our lord is...”

Chapter 13

Spiders

The fire flared up and Dumbledore's head appeared amidst the flames. "I apologize for the interruption, Severus. I came to inform you that there will be a meeting for all staff 10 minutes from now." With that he disappeared, choosing to ignore Lucius' presence altogether.

Severus sighed. "I suppose you better go, Lucius. We will discuss this further however."

He walked Lucius out of his chambers and to the main hall before heading for Dumbledore's office. Most of the teachers were already there, looking nervous and fidgeting slightly.

"The recent events that have befallen the school are much more dangerous than I realized and so for this reason I must ask you all to summon up your courage. I want you all to walk your students from class to class, make sure no one strays and protect them if anything should attack. These events occurred 50 years ago as well and I am saddened to admit that the Chamber of Secrets has been opened once again." Dumbledore looked older than ever as he pressed his fingers to his forehead and gravely smiled at the teachers.

:One Week Before Yule Holidays:

Harry smiled as he felt a cool hand tug his earlobe. He turned to face a smirking Draco who looked immensely pleased with himself.

"I've just had a couple of parting words with Potter," Draco explained. "Apparently she really is leaving a week earlier than we are according to Dumbledore's orders."

Harry frowned and nodded. "I want to know what's going on," he murmured. "She's been getting more attention than usual lately."

"With the attacks suddenly stopping it does make one wonder," Draco agreed. "The impression it's left on the school isn't one I'd concur with."

Harry stood and picked up his book. He had to return it to the library and now was as good a time as ever. Draco walked alongside him. They didn't bother ask Blaise, who had stopped talking much lately. Ever since Theodore was petrified he had drifted away. Harry and Draco had at first tried to cheer him, but even they lost to patience.

Classes had not swayed from the ordinary schedule but for a while teachers had escorted them to and from classes. Now with the attacks no longer a danger to the students, they had ceased their ministrations. While Harry and Draco had been pleased with the lack of excitement, they were still wary. Jamie Potter had done nothing about the Chamber of Secrets or the basilisk that inhibited it.

Harry had been adamant about having Aeni keep a watch everyday. She would leave in the morning and spend the day concealing herself then slithering through the halls. Perhaps she would find what neither Harry nor Draco could.

When the boys had stopped actively searching for trouble, Severus and Lucius had relaxed considerably. Severus knew better and had no delusions of the boys actually giving up but he acknowledged that for now, they could step aside. Lucius had noticed something amiss with their actions but had said nothing even when they were over for the holidays.

Narcissa on the other hand had given them a sharp assessing gaze before fawning over them as usual. Altogether, the Yule holidays had passed quickly and even though Harry and Draco were still upset about Theodore, they found it in themselves to enjoy spending time at Malfoy Manor.

During the span of all of this, they had never once forgotten where Hagrid was and what he had told them.

Spiders.

“Again,” ordered Dumbledore.

Jamie stared hard at him before reluctantly standing and attempting the spell once more. She had spent the last couple of months training every weekend as Dumbledore had ordered. When she left the school earlier than other students, Jamie had been anxious and excited. Special treatment meant only one thing: Dumbledore was finally starting her training. Her joy however, had soon turned into resentment.

The spells he had her practice were difficult for her to master and sometimes they were even dangerous. Nevertheless, Lily and James had told her they were proud and awaited to be shown what she could do now.

Jamie had been ashamed to admit just how pathetic she had really been the previous year. This year, while she wasn't amazing at the training she was put through, Jamie had improved both physically and mentally. Dumbledore's constant influence the last few weeks had opened her eyes to some of the things that had been happening and despite hating the work she had to do, Jamie found it in herself to care.

The only thing that had yet to change was her intense dislike of Harry.

Dumbledore inhaled deeply and let his breathing even out slowly. “Troubling times are upon us, Fawkes.”

The phoenix cooed and nudged its head against Dumbledore's chin in comfort as if to say, “Alas, perhaps the world may find it in themselves to forgive an old man of his manipulations.”

“Once they had been informed to the truth and how I hid it from them, there will be no redemption,” Dumbledore replied solemnly.

Fawkes sat silently, wishing there were more options available for his carer to take. Dumbledore smiled faintly and popped a lemon drop in his mouth, trying to savour the treat. It was not surprising when the candy left a bitter taste on his tongue.

Harry took a deep breath. It was just another Quidditch game. The Gryffindor team had a new seeker but that was all right. It was no one special, no one who had any particularly good skills. Harry nodded to Flint as they prepared to take off.

Just another match, Harry thought again as he tried to push aside the niggling feeling of dread from his mind.

He kicked off as the whistle blew and flew over the pitch in search for the snitch. The game went on, perfectly normal. Harry flew spectacularly and smiled when he saw his friends watching him with pride. He was a representative of the second years. Suddenly Harry found himself flying faster in search of the snitch.

Within a few minutes, he spotted the golden ball and snorted when he realized that the Gryffindor seeker was on the other side of the pitch. As he reached forward to clasp the ball, a loud groan went through the Gryffindor side of the stadium. Ball held tightly in his fist, Harry ducked his head and chuckled silently. Then he saw what had been troubling him. Out of his peripheral vision, he could see none other than Lily and James Potter sitting with their daughter.

A cold feeling slithered down his spine as he hurried to reach the ground. He did not want to accidentally bump into James. The last time they had met, the meeting had been far from pleasant. Harry had no desire to repeat it.

Draco and Blaise met him with smiles of congratulations. Harry was happy to see that Blaise's smile was genuine, which meant he had forgotten to brood over Theodore for once.

"Let's get back to the dorms. I don't fancy walking back to castle freezing because I took a shower out here." Draco chuckled and threw his arm over Harry's shoulder as they walked back to the castle, narrowly missing the Potters.

"Spiders," Draco murmured, glancing at the long line of scurrying spiders as they tried in vain to squeeze past each other to escape the castle.

Harry looked at the blond in question. "We don't have anything important to do today," he began.

Draco grinned and cut him off. "It would be rude of us to not at least examine the matter."

They traded conspiratorial glances and hurried to follow the spiders. It was not long before they saw where the tiny creatures were heading.

"The forest," Harry said, dreading the outcome of this particular adventure.

Draco grabbed his elbow and stalked determinedly towards the forest causing Harry to laugh. He linked arms with his friend so as to keep them together. It was easy to get lost in the forest, even in daylight where it still remained as dark as night. Once they had stepped past the initial trees, all traces of emotion left their faces.

Harry lit up his wand, keeping the light dimmed, as they walked further and further into the depths of the shrubbery. As impossible as it might seem, their surroundings got even darker. A shudder went through Draco as he stepped into a spider web. Harry turned to help remove the web.

His fingers brushed the pale skin lightly as they collected the sticky substance. Draco smiled and thanked him softly before linking their arms and stepping forward to lead them instead. Harry let Draco take control, trusting the boy enough to know that he would be safe from being led into purposeful danger.

And that was when it happened.

They stepped into a clearing and were bombarded with large spiders. Draco and Harry stood back-to-back, wands out and raised threateningly. Just as the spiders made to attack, a voice called out and ordered them to halt. The owner of the voice crawled out causing the two boys' eyes to widen. If they had thought the other spiders were large, then this one was enormous.

"Why have you come here?" it rasped out.

"Hagrid told us to come here for answers," Harry responded, thankful that his voice didn't waver in the slightest.

The spider clicked its pincers. "You are a brave one, friend of Hagrid. But I cannot help you."

"Just tell us one thing," Draco snapped. "Is it a basilisk?"

The spiders around them hissed furiously and made to attack. When their hesitant actions were not called off, they lunged forward. In defence of Harry and Draco, it was easy to say that they fought valiantly. Unfortunately there were just too many spiders for them to escape them all.

Harry grimly cast a succession of spells, and vaguely realized that the sound of hooves could be heard nearby. Within the next few moments, both boys were in a dazed understanding. The spiders they had been fighting had disappeared and they had been swung up onto the backs of...horses?

No, Harry realized a moment later. The centaurs had saved them. Draco, who looked decidedly green, appeared to have noticed just who had saved them.

“Refrain from purging yourself while you are there, young human,” chuckled the older centaur.

Draco nodded and then confirmed it was not the best thing to do when one was feeling ill. Harry smiled slightly and thanked the centaurs when he noticed that his own hero was none other than Firenze.

The centaurs led them to the edge of the forest and smiled kindly at them, at the same time they looked concerned for themselves. It was a known fact that centaurs were not allowed to act in any way subservient to humans. What they had just done was not the first time either. Their comrades would not be pleased.

Regardless of this, Firenze and the elder smiled reassuringly. “Young ones, do not come into this forest. Not now, not until there is no other option.”

Mars was bright that night.

Chapter 14

Revival

Harry groaned and pressed his temple fiercely with the tips of his fingers. It had been almost an hour since he had decided to sleep yet he lay wide awake. Worst of all was the fact that his mind was being plagued by thoughts of the Potters. Harry admitted to himself that he had been curious when he saw the Potters earlier, but now all he wanted to do was forget about them.

There was too much thinking involved when it came to those pompous gits. Harry sighed then sat up and readjusted his pillow before falling back to the bed. It was a tad bit more comfortable but did not help his predicament in any way. He resigned himself to quickly giving the issue some thought.

No special events were taking place at the school so they could not be there for those reasons. The Quidditch game itself was not very exciting either. Harry doubted that, even if James loved Quidditch, he would come to watch students playing the sport when he could get professional tickets.

Lily had absolutely no reason to come to Hogwarts because Jamie had gone home just recently to visit her parents. Harry grimaced. He was plain confused. There were no obvious or any subtle reasons as to why the damn Potters had shown up and it was infuriating the boy. He growled into his pillow and squeezed his eyes closed. Someone was going to pay if he got no sleep that night. Harry looked over at Draco's bed and saw a tuft of blond hair peeking out over a thick comforter.

:Bastard: Harry hissed, only realizing he had spoken in Parseltongue when Aeni slithered out from under his bed.

Aeni had made the underside of the bed her permanent residence for the moment. Harry had placed heating charms underneath for her

and she found it more comfortable than sleeping on the bed on his pillow.

:Child of unmarried? How uncouth: Aeni hissed back, lazily coiling herself on a discarded pillow.

:He is not really a bastard: Harry explained quickly. He didn't want to destroy the slight friendship that had built up between the two.

Aeni looked at him as assertively as a snake could. :Relief that is! I like the young one. He tastes of bitter.:

Harry gave her an odd look but did not question the weird description. :Go back to sleep, Aeni. I do not dare wake tomorrow and find us both grumpy. Merlin knows what we would do to Draco and Blaise.:

Aeni let out a spitting laugh and made herself comfortable. She was too tired to go back underneath the bed and the pillow was warm with body heat. Harry smiled at her before closing his eyes. Thankfully his eyelids felt heavy already and sleep crashed over him before he had time to think of the Potters again.

The diary lay open over Ginny's face. Her skin was a sickly pale colour and her eyes were bloodshot. They remained wide open despite the unconscious state of the girl. Her fingers twitched occasionally as if an inner struggle attempted to swipe the diary away from her. Small bursts of light seeped through the crease of the pages. If one looked close enough they would see a misty substance, similar to the one in Snape's Pensieve, entering the diary from Ginny's temples.

Words in precise handwriting flowed over the parchment, followed intently by the still open eyes. Inwardly, Ginny cried for the manipulation over her mind and prayed someone would save her. She screamed as Tom delved further into her memories, replacing some and erasing others.

Ginny couldn't think anymore, she did not understand exactly what she had been scared of. Her hands moved slowly and lifted the diary clear off of her face. She stared at it uncertainly before reading the text that had just appeared.

Are you all right?

The girl smiled. Tom was there for her. Tom was concerned for her. Picking up her quill and inkpot, Ginny began to reply. Not once did she remember the dangers of Tom Riddle's diary.

Dumbledore stood with a bright twinkle in his eyes, a beaming smile on his face. "I have good news, students! Madam Pomfrey, with the help of Professor Sprout's Mandrakes and Professor Snape's brewing skills, has administered the Mandrake Draught to those who were petrified. Their recovery is well on its way and you should expect to see them in class with you all, very soon."

Cheers rose up amongst the students, and even Slytherin house couldn't hold back their pleased smiles. Blaise was overjoyed and grinned shamelessly at his two best friends.

"Theo's going to be okay!" he cried out, relieved beyond belief.

"We told you he was going to be all right," Harry said, smiling as well.

"After all, Professor Snape was helping in the treatment," Draco supplied, sharing a knowing smile with Harry.

Blaise bit his lip. "I'll have to thank him later then! Maybe I'll thank Madam Pomfrey too, while I'm visiting Theodore. Actually...I think I'll leave now."

He waved at the other two and practically ran out the door with a couple of other students.

Draco arched a brow and looked at Harry. "You don't think there's something going on between Blaise and Theodore, do you?"

"What do you mean?" Harry looked bemused.

Draco coughed slightly. "Like...you know...a romantic relationship?"

"Romantic!" Harry cried out.

Draco shushed him. "Not so loud! I might not be right, but there seems to be something going on between them. Something they aren't telling us."

Harry sighed and pursed his lips. "Now that you mention it, I have noticed something but...are you sure it could be romantic? I can't picture romantic and Blaise in the same sentence."

Draco chuckled and threw an arm over Harry's shoulders. "Me neither. But this means we'll have to watch them more carefully from now on. I doubt either one of them would admit anything to us."

"It's almost as if they don't trust us," Harry and Draco muttered in unison. They smiled at each other and laughed.

Things were looking up and the boys were happy to just relax.

Jamie wiped her brow and frowned. She still hadn't completed the spell accurately! The last try had been her tenth time and it was getting exhausting keeping up the magical effort. Dumbledore however looked pleased with her results and encouraged her to try again. He waved his own wand and indicated to the looser flow of the last flick. Jamie sighed patiently and raised her wand once more.

As tiring as the practice was, both the physical with Dumbledore and theory with her parents, Jamie found herself enjoying the increasing power in her stance. She had caught up to the other students and

learned a couple more spells. Granted, they weren't OWL level but they were beyond a second year's level.

James and Lily had been proud of her progress and had done their best to advance her knowledge in theory. Jamie grudgingly told them that she had trouble understanding and memorizing the theory behind spells. James told her it was natural at her age and did his best to help her. Jamie found herself loving her parents more than ever.

A small part of her still celebrated the fact that Harry was no longer with them. She had their full attention now, like she deserved. The rest of Jamie had given up on tormenting the boy for the moment. There were more pressing things that concerned at the moment. When her abilities were more solid and she was more confident, Jamie planned to challenge Harry to another duel. This time she would win.

"I am rather delighted that you found time in your busy schedule to meet with this old man," Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling kindly.

"Sir, with all due respect, what do you want?" Harry asked quickly, wanting to leave.

"Relax, Harry. I only wish to speak to you about how you are handling the conflicts that have arisen." Dumbledore pulled out a tin can and held it out for his student. "Lemon Drop?"

"No thank you, sir." Harry cleared his throat. "As for your question, I really don't see much of a problem where the Potters are concerned. I mean, I haven't had any contact with them for a while now. This conversation is a bit pointless."

Dumbledore sighed and pressed his fingers together. "I must apologize for talking to you about this at such a late date. I wanted to ask how you were much earlier of course, but as we have never spent much time together, I was unsure as to how to approach the subject."

Harry sneered. It did not take a genius to figure out that Dumbledore was lying for the most part. There was a hint of honesty to his tone but the lies, in this case, outweighed the truth. Dumbledore smiled sadly when he saw Harry's expression of disbelief.

Takes after Severus, Dumbledore thought, chuckling inwardly.

"Very well then. You may go for now, Harry. Perhaps we can have another meeting in the not too distant future." Dumbledore smiled one last time at the boy as he left the office.

"Oh dear, Fawkes. It seems that I cannot mend the rift that is slowly increasing between Harry and I."

Fawkes crooned softly.

"Harry is growing up to be a good boy. I can tell he will be strong, independent and a wonderful leader. Slytherin was really the best choice for him after all." Dumbledore looked at the sorting hat.

"Jamie is also getting better at magic. Her potential to be a great witch is there but she has not grasped enough concept of magic to start working on that goal. I can feel her want to be powerful, but it is not yet the right time for her. Alas, my patience must be tested with her. She is at least up to standard now, surpassing a couple of her classmates. I have a feeling that when the time comes, she will be ready."

Chapter 15

Oh, Myrtle

Lucius pressed his fingers into his temples, trying to relieve some of the strain on his forehead. It was habit Severus was fond of doing, and Lucius could not escape the treatment. He reached out towards his desk and grabbed a tumbler filled to the brim with whisky. He did not even hesitate before gulping it down.

The familiar burn in the pit of his stomach was a welcome reminder as he pulled away from his thoughts. He did not want to keep looking back at the past, or dream about the future. Lucius was content just living in the present. He smiled. The future did look good however, if all his lord's plans were successful that year. It all depended on the death of one child.

He leaned back into his armchair and sighed, thinking back to the day he found out who was to die. Truth be told, Lucius had been shocked. The child had no relation to Voldemort or any extraordinary power. Lucius still did not know exactly why Voldemort chose them. Even as one of his most trusted followers, Lucius had been unable to figure out the reason.

"Myrtle," Harry called out, entering the nearly deserted bathroom.

Myrtle flew out of a stall in the back and grinned at Harry. She sat down on a low beam and waved at him. "Hello, Harry."

"How are you?" Harry asked, locking the door behind him.

She sighed and frowned a bit. "Dead, but better than usual. No one's visited me in a while and that's both depressing and relieving."

"I'm sorry for not coming here more often, Myrtle," Harry offered. He made himself comfortable on an upturned cauldron in the corner of the room.

"Not a problem, Harry. I'm used to being along." Her watery smile disappeared within moments, replaced by an eager look. "Have you found out anything about the attacks, by the way?"

Harry licked his lips and cast a simplified version of the silencing charm on the door of the room. It wasn't as good as the proper version and could only soundproof the door, not the room, but it would do for the moment.

"Draco and I have discovered that the creature in the chamber is a basilisk," he admitted.

"What's a basilisk?" Myrtle asked, curious.

"It's an enormous snake that kills its victims by looking them in the eye. Those who see a reflection of the eyes are petrified however. That's why no one's died yet." Harry leaned against the wall and sighed.

"By looking into its eyes, you say?" Myrtle floated closer to Harry. "Maybe that's how I died."

"What?" Harry sat up straight, brow furrowed.

"I was in here, crying because of a bully, and I heard hissing. I thought it was just someone coming to torment me, so I opened the door to tell them to buzz off...and I died." Myrtle placed a hand against her mouth. "What you said about the eyes makes sense, because that's all I remember seeing before I died."

"Oh Myrtle," Harry said softly, noticing the ghost's trembling body. "Thank you for telling me."

"What are you going to do now?" Myrtle whispered, looking intrigued and frightened.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. The attacks have stopped, and I have a feeling this has to do with Voldemort but I'm not entirely against him or supporting him. The students who were petrified are waking up and I'm not one for revenge either. I don't know what to do with this information. I don't want to pursue a basilisk when I don't even know where the Chamber of secrets is."

"Maybe it's under the sink," Myrtle pondered. She pointed out a snake etched in a sink that had never worked.

Harry glared at her. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I didn't realize before." She shrugged, unapologetically.

She was lying.

Harry prepared to say something when a dark shadow passed over her face, making it more ghostly than ever. It was similar to the Bloody Baron's effects and Harry wondered what had happened to give her that expression.

Briefly her eyes flickered towards the door and she pursed her lips.

Harry tensed when he heard the click of the door being unlocked. He ran into one of the stalls and locked it behind him. A sigh of relief escaped him when he heard a familiar voice.

"It's me, Harry," Draco said, arching a brow at the boy as he stepped out of the stall.

"Precautions," Harry explained, his dignity never faltering.

Draco smirked but did not comment.

"You're forgetting something," Myrtle said in a singsong voice. "I wouldn't let *him* see it if I were you."

Draco glared at her. "What? You can't be serious." He looked at Harry, eyes narrowed.

Harry bit his lip and frowned. "Wait outside for me?" he asked. "I just have to investigate something."

Draco scowled and left, huffing. Harry looked at his retreating back in confusion. What was that? Shaking his head in bewilderment, Harry knelt down and looked closely at the snake on the tap.

"This has to be it," he whispered.

Harry bit his lip to contain his grin of excitement and rushed out of the bathroom. Draco was nowhere to be seen. Feeling a bit let down, Harry ran back to his shared room. His best friend lay on the bed, stewing in his anger.

"What's wrong?" Harry inquired, sitting down near the foot of the bed.

"Why are you being so evasive? I thought we were in this together," Draco snapped, glaring heatedly at the boy. "And tell me why you're suddenly listening to the likes of Moaning Myrtle?"

"Evasive?" Harry murmured in confusion. "When did I not tell you something?"

"Just now, in the bathroom," Draco yelled, infuriated at how slow the boy was. "You listened to a ghost over me."

"I never meant to leave you out of the loop, I just wanted to check something out without Myrtle complaining. It isn't as if I won't tell you what." Harry pursed his lips.

Draco looked at, eyes sharp and piercing. Harry would never admit it, but that stare frightened him. That stare made him want to reveal everything in his very soul.

"What could be so important?" Draco sat up, eyes softening.

Harry licked his lips. He looked up at Draco with shining, eager eyes. "I found the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets."

"What!" Draco leaned forward and narrowed his eyes. "What are we going to do?"

“Nothing.” Harry shrugged. “There haven’t been anymore attacks and we don’t have any obligation to stop them. Why put our lives at risk for the sake of others anyways?”

Draco nodded slowly, not meeting Harry’s eyes.

:He would risk his life to save you.: Aeni said slowly, reeling from the emotional waves coming from the blond.

Harry smiled. :That works both ways.:

:Yet you will leave without him to risk anger upon you.: Aeni hissed.

Harry glared at her balefully when Draco looked at them confusion. :I need to go by myself.:

“What is she saying?” Draco asked.

“You don’t want to know,” Harry commented, glaring at the snake.

:Why? You made clear that you are not one mortal saviour.: Aeni wrapped herself around his shoulders, growing in length to keep him from pushing her off.

:I am going for selfish reasons, Aeni. There is something that tells me not to share my secrets with the others.: Harry tried to explain.

Aeni spat violently, it was an odd imitation of laughter. :You care for your boy.:

:So?: Harry challenged.

Aeni only laughed again, scaring Draco.

“Don’t make her angry, Harry. I don’t fancy a poisonous snake coming after us,” Draco said, shuddering.

Harry grinned. “She was laughing so I doubt that she would come after us.”

Draco looked at Aeni oddly. “Snakes are weird.”

“You’re lucky she can’t understand you.”

“Lucky, huh?”

His eyes felt sore, his mouth tasted sour and Theodore had never felt better knowing that he was alive. To have been lucky enough to save himself by looking at a reflection of the monster in the school made Theo both relieved and scared. It hurt to move but Theodore understood that he had a duty to tell someone what happened.

His body however, unused to being moved in the last little while, panicked. It seized up, goose bumps scattering over the skin, causing Theo pain. He bit his lip and jerkily rolled out of bed. *Harry...Draco...Blaise...you need to know*, he thought.

Theo had taken only two steps when Severus and Madam Pomfrey entered, bickering like an old married couple. Theo shuddered at the mental image, alerting them to his presence. Severus looked pleased to see him awake, but irritated that he was out of bed. It was funny how Madam Pomfrey’s face mirrored the expression

“Mr. Nott, must I lecture you?” Madam Pomfrey snapped.

Theodore shook his head quickly and crawled back into his bed, knowing better than to argue with the nurse. Madam Pomfrey nodded approvingly and bustled off to check on the other patients. It was rather late at night by now and she wanted to feed them before they drifted off to sleep.

“Professor,” Theo said urgently.

Severus arched a brow.

“The monster, the Chamber of Secrets’ monster, is a Basilisk,” Theodore nearly yelled.

“Hush, boy.” Severus looked around and surrounded them with silencing charms. “Do Harry or Draco know?” He didn’t bother add Blaise, the boy was too lost in his misery to take action.

“I don’t know,” Theo said honestly. “But...those two are clever. They might have figured out what the monster is and where the Chamber is for all we know.”

Severus cursed.

Harry slipped out of bed and looked over at Draco who slept peacefully. He lightly touched his friend’s shoulder, debating whether to wake him or not. Slowly, his hand slipped off of the shoulder and Harry walked out of the room. Under a Disillusionment charm, Harry ran to Myrtle’s bathroom.

Myrtle was waiting for him. Her face was strangely solemn, her face looking more mature. There was something terrifying about her as she came to float in front of Harry.

“If you die, there isn’t a second chance,” she whispered. “You can’t control monsters, Harry and who knows what you will find down there.”

“I could always come back as a ghost and share your toilet,” Harry joked, his eyes frozen over.

Myrtle smiled bitterly. “Becoming a ghost would be the worst mistake you could ever make.”

Harry nodded, all traces of mirth disappearing. He traced the snake on the tap once again and let a sibilant stream of hissing command the entrance to open. With a loud crumbling sound the sinks broke apart, revealing a hole. Harry looked at Myrtle who smiled icily.

“Before you go in, I should tell you. Someone else has already entered the Chamber.”

Harry did not stick around to ask who but jumped in instead. A chilling trickle of fear ran down his spine and Harry realized that he was actually frightened of Myrtle's secrecy. Whoever was down there would not be a pleasant opponent if they were not an ally.

Chapter 16

Confrontation

Harry landed in a disgusting pile of whatever had degenerated to mush. He cast a quick cleaning spell on himself. It wasn't the strongest, but it did remove most of the gunk. A quick *Lumos* illuminated the tunnel. Harry paid no mind to the basilisk's snakeskin, if he survived, he would take some back to Severus, or bring the Potions Master there.

Shivering slightly because of the cold, Harry quickly made his way through the tunnel. There was no point in trying to surprise his opponent, they would already know he was coming thanks to Myrtle. He reached a wall and admired the snakes carved into the stone. They looked fantastically real, just like the one on the tap. Harry braced himself and whispered for them to open in Parseltongue. They slithered to the side and unlocked the doorway.

Harry squinted as he stepped into a dimly lit room. It was empty except for the many tunnel entrances that branched out from it. In the far end of the room, were two figures. Harry frowned and slowly walked forward, taking his time. He could not see the figures clearly and therefore did not know who they were. However, judging by the one on the floor, it was obvious that it was a girl and a victim of whoever was standing.

"Welcome, Harry Potter," the figure said darkly.

"Who are you?" Harry snapped, pausing. He still could not see the male.

Vibrant letters swirled into the air as a soft incantation was recited.

I am Lord Voldemort.

"How is that possible?" Harry asked, genuinely curious. He began walking forwards once more.

The grip on his wand tightened as he saw that the girl on the floor was Ginny Weasley. Harry only glanced at her and saw that she was awake but bound by spells. Green eyes travelled up to look into the face of Tom Riddle. A gasp unwillingly echoed throughout the room. Tom froze, his eyes glazing over.

"Tom?" Harry whispered, staring at the boy in shock.

Tom blinked a few times before his eyes cleared. "Harry!" Then almost to himself he muttered, "I knew there was something about you I recognized."

"How can you be here?" Harry replied. Then he looked at the writing. "Voldemort."

"We share a connection," Harry said slowly, looking back at Tom who nodded.

Tom sighed. "I gave you the power to look into my past."

Harry bit his lip. "But why didn't you recognize me before we saw each other clearly?"

Ginny stared at Harry in horror, her lips moved frantically as she sought to speak. The silencing charm upon her was powerful however, and Ginny could do nothing.

"I've seen you before as well, through Ginny Weasley's eyes, but I could not piece together who you were to the younger me. It's because my future self interfered with the diary. It was created before the new memories took place. Then I created it again afterwards with the new memories of you. The magic must have been confused attempting to figure out what exactly was happening. In result, the diary of the present day was never updated and when I saw you, all my memories came back from the diary you saw in the past. I am still connected to the diary, Harry. As soon as Ginny Weasley is dead, I will become human once more." Tom looked at the boy curiously.

"It makes sense as odd as that sounds," Harry replied, avoiding Tom's eye.

“What will we do now?” Tom inquired. “I am the reason for all the attacks, for much of the suffering you were put through and I plan to kill the girl who is in all sense, innocent.”

Ginny’s eyes watered as she tried to plead with Harry to save her.

Ginny’s POV

Harry! Don’t do this to me! I just wanted to be with you, to be closer to you. What happened to the little boy I saw at Potter Manor? What happened to his shy eyes? Harry...I love you. It’s not a silly crush like Ron says. It’s not...Please, don’t let me die. Save me and let me be with you.

Save me?

Harry...

HARRY!

“Will you help me or oppose me, Harry? Is this the end of our friendship?”

Tom’s eyes were filled with hope that he had not allowed himself to feel in decades. Harry looked at Ginny and turned away, closing his eyes. He stepped closer to Tom.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered to Ginny who was sobbing. “Tom has more of a purpose in life than you ever will and I cannot let that opportunity pass.”

Goodbye, Harry. I’m sorry you couldn’t save me or yourself.

Tom smiled and raised Ginny’s wand. “Thank you, Ginny.” And with a flash of green light her eyes dimmed.

Tom fell to his knees and cried out. Harry ran to his side and cradled the larger body against his as the boy writhed and screamed out in pain.

"TOM!" Harry was short of panicking when Tom fell limp.

Slowly the features of his boyish face changed into the ones of a man, his body lengthened and matured. Harry watched in amazement as the 16 year old body turned into one of 20 years old.

"Tom," Harry gasped as crimson eyes fluttered open. "Your eyes, your body..."

Tom sat up with some help and examined his body. He grabbed Ginny's wand and conjured a mirror.

"What an interesting progression," he said, a smile on his lips, eyes hungrily examining his youth and power.

Harry laughed and hugged him tightly. Tom returned the embrace and kissed ebony locks.

"I missed you," Harry murmured into the man's chest.

"And I you," Tom responded, holding the boy closer. "I considered you almost like a brother, if we had not kissed, then I would have sealed my impression of us being family."

"Those don't count," Harry said, blushing slightly. "We're brothers as far as I know, unless...you don't want me as your younger brother. I don't want to be a burden on you as you will be busy no doubt."

"I would love to have you as a part of my family, you will be the first in it," Tom said, chuckling. "Perhaps regaining my sanity was a mistake," he said, giving Harry a stern look. "If these are the stunts you pull every year, I fear to see what I might have to do through the rest of your time at Hogwarts."

Harry made a face at him. "Prude."

"Brat."

"I thought you were better than that. You *are* supposed to be the older one here," Harry teased. His eyes rolled and fell on Ginny causing his smile to fade.

"You did what you thought was right, Harry." Tom ran his fingers through his hair. "Her death should not plague you, she was insignificant and sacrifices must be made all the time. It is unfortunate but she would have died in a few more years regardless. War will come and she, possessing little magical power, would have died more cruelly than tonight."

Harry nodded, smiling softly. "It was for the best. I will take her body back with me however. It will be respectful and Dumbledore will hold me in higher regard than he does now."

"I need to get out of here soon," Tom said sadly. "For the moment, I will be going to Malfoy Manor. Lucius' child will be able to help you contact me should you need to. I'd rather you withstand the rest of the school year without contacting me. We shall make arrangements to discuss what will happen in the future during your summer holidays."

Harry nodded. "All right, Tom."

He pulled away and raised his wand to levitate Ginny. "I guess I'll be taking her now."

"Take this as well," Tom said, handing the boy Ginny's wand.

"But...how will you escape and how will I get out of here?" Harry asked.

"I kept a spare wand in one of the tunnels. It's still there, I can feel it," Tom assured, smirking. "There's an exit down the last tunnel there that will lead you into the dungeons."

"Thank you." Harry smiled slightly. "Goodbye for now then."

"Take care," Tom replied, walking off in the direction of one of the tunnels.

Harry levitated Ginny out of the Chamber, following Tom's simple instructions. The exit's lock was a bit rusty due to lack of use, but opened easily with a forceful *Alohomora*. Harry went through first then levitated Ginny out after him. The feel of damp air was enough to tell him that he was indeed in the dungeons. Harry did not waste any time and sped off towards Dumbledore's office, Ginny in tow.

Severus raised his wand as he felt a magical presence brush over his skin. He sharply turned to look at a pale and exhausted Harry.

"Where have you been, boy?" Severus roared, looking at Ginny.

Harry flinched. "Can we talk later, Severus? I really need to get her to Dumbledore. I can't hold the spell much longer."

Severus flicked his wand expertly and took the task of levitating the deceased girl onto himself. Harry sighed in relief and flexed his arm. He bit his lip, watching as an invisibility charm was cast upon Ginny.

"I need to talk to Dumbledore first, but I'll explain everything, I swear to Merlin," Harry pleaded, hating the dark look in his mentor's eyes.

"Very well. That explanation will be as detailed as I request it," Severus said softly, voice nearly a hiss.

"Yes, sir."

Severus did not waste any time in getting to Dumbledore's office. His strides were powerful and lengthy, making Harry jog lightly to keep up. The password to enter was said so softly, that it was almost missed by both Harry and the gargoyle. Harry looked at Severus questioningly as the man led the way up the spiral stairs. He was acting rather oddly and it was unnerving to see.

"Severus," Dumbledore said pleasantly.

He then saw Ginny and grew sombre. "What has happened?"

Severus clenched his teeth. The old coot knew exactly what had happened. Being excluded and kept ignorant did not bode well with Severus.

“She’s dead,” Severus said plainly, letting the girl’s body rest on the sofa that Dumbledore conjured.

“I know that, my dear boy, but how?” Dumbledore enunciated, giving Severus a stern glance.

Harry’s eyebrows furrowed. Dumbledore treated Severus much like a child even after the man had proven himself to be mentally older than appearance granted him. It was a rather amusing sight but Harry could not bring up any mirth within himself with Ginny’ body lying there. He had made the right decision and he did not regret it, but the death of the girl would plague him and he knew it.

“It begins with my trip to the girl’s bathroom,” Harry said suddenly, shocking both Dumbledore and Severus.

Chapter 17

Dumbledore's Judgement

"I go in there to talk to Myrtle sometimes, I figured it was safe as no one uses that bathroom," Harry said, looking at his shoes. "She gets lonely and I happen to like talking to her because she can't make judgements about me like humans."

"This time when I went in, she told me that a girl had fallen into a tunnel that extended from under the sinks. I don't know what happened, but the sinks were pushed out of the way and the tunnel was open. I went down the tunnel to try and help the girl."

Severus led Harry to a seat and forced him to sit down.

"At the end of the tunnel was a hallway that led to a bigger chamber. I saw that it was Ginny and when I went to go help her, I discovered she was dead. I'm sorry, headmaster. I couldn't do anything." Harry ducked his head and fought back true tears that threatened to escape his eyes.

"You could not have done anything, Harry," Dumbledore said kindly, placing a hand on the boy's shoulder. "What you did was courageous and honourable. I am positive her parents will want to thank you for bringing her body back."

Harry could only nod. He hated himself at the moment, but everything that had happened was supposed to and he couldn't bring himself to regret his choices.

"Sir. I don't know what killed her, but I escaped before whatever it was made itself known," Harry whispered, looking at Dumbledore and frowning. "The tunnel closed up, but I can show you where it is. I think whatever is down there might have been the reason for the attacks."

"The monster I believe is a basilisk," Dumbledore said, sighing. "A very dangerous foe."

"You shan't be able to enter the chamber, headmaster. It is the Chamber of Secrets and only a Parselmouth can open it," the sorting hat interrupted.

Dumbledore looked at Ginny sadly. "The only explanation is that Ginny Weasley was a Parselmouth."

Severus looked at the headmaster sharply. "That would mean the girl was responsible for the attacks."

"Indeed," Dumbledore replied sadly. "We cannot let the world know of this. It is too monstrous and there are many unsolved factors. This blame, however unfortunate, will be placed upon Voldemort as I am sure he is connected to this. Ginny was controlled by him somehow and acted against her will, in the end she was murdered. That explains how the chamber was opened as well, since Voldemort is also a Parselmouth."

Severus and Harry nodded, accepting the story for the public.

"Very well." Dumbledore smiled tersely. "I shall firecall Molly and Arthur Weasley."

It was not long before the Weasleys entered Dumbledore's office. They looked worried, and Harry assumed that Dumbledore had not told them the circumstances just yet. He flinched when a shriek tore itself out of Molly's mouth as she saw her beloved daughter.

"GINNY!" Molly rushed over to her and flinched back when it was apparent that the girl was dead.

Arthur was more reserved in his distress, but fell to his knees beside the girl's body. "Ginny. What...what happened to her?" he asked, not caring who answered.

Molly sobbed into Arthur's chest and Harry felt a twist of guilt within himself. He fought back his own tears, alerting Severus to notice something was wrong. Severus frowned to himself, he would have to drill Harry for information in the privacy of his chambers.

Dumbledore looked upon the scene sombrely and began to explain what had happened. He looked at Harry briefly and told them that at the risk of his own life, Harry had brought back her body. Molly had shakily pulled away from Arthur at that point and had hugged him tightly. Harry stiffened but did not pull away.

“Thank you, dear. You will never know how much I appreciate this.” Molly smiled warmly at him through her tears.

Arthur came up behind her and placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Thank you, Harry. James and Lily were wrong in their decision to disown you.”

Harry looked down at his shoes but returned their smiles genuinely. Perhaps, there was hope for the rest of the Weasleys. Harry thought of Charlie once more and his smile widened fractionally.

“Albus, I will be taking Ginny back,” Arthur said, tears glistening in his eyes.

Dumbledore only nodded and watched sorrowfully as Molly and Arthur left, Ginny held carefully in Arthur’s arms. Once they had left, Dumbledore turned to Harry and looked at him seriously.

“I will not tell the school of this incident in order to keep you safe, Harry. There could very well be onslaught from not only Gryffindor but Slytherin as well,” Dumbledore said gravely.

Harry nodded his agreement. “I will not speak of it to anyone, headmaster. I was placed in Slytherin for a reason and value my safety more than fame.”

“That is a strong belief and an intelligent one. You will be safe from any of Voldemort’s remaining followers this way.”

The next day, when students filed into the Great Hall for breakfast, they were surprised to find the hall decorated in black. The older

students looked at Dumbledore, shocked. The first years murmured amongst themselves about what it could mean, but fell silent as the older students shushed them.

“I have grave news on this bleak morning,” Dumbledore began. “A fellow student died yesterday as she was manipulated into a dangerous situation. I ask that all of you give one minute of silence to Ginny Weasley.”

Gasps rose among the students. The Weasley children, who had been told earlier by their parents, looked down at their hands, avoiding their peers’ eyes. The occasional tear slipped from their eyes, but they did not wipe it away.

Harry watched this from the Slytherin table, holding back his own tears. The guilt was consuming and frightening, but he didn’t regret it and that was all that kept him from confessing the truth. He would get over Ginny’s death in due time because Tom was now free and Tom was what mattered.

Draco’s eyes were narrowed in confusion. What could have possibly happened? From across him, Blaise and Theodore had paled slightly. They were all curious and a tad frightened. The attacks that year had made everyone paranoid and Draco suspected that the monster in the Chamber of Secrets probably killed Ginny. It looked as if the other believed this as well.

One minute passed and Dumbledore stood once more. “As most of you suspect, her death was caused by the perpetrator of the attacks this past year. You have no worries as the culprit has been taken care of and apprehended.”

A collective sigh rose from the students.

Dumbledore smiled wearily. “Classes will be cancelled from now until the end of term. The next two days are for your use to grieve for Ginny Weasley. Her death is unexpected and a shock to us all, please do not disrespect this time I have given you in any way. Now if you will all excuse me, I must go see about getting our groundskeeper back.”

Harry looked at Severus in trepidation after telling the man the entire story. First he had had to explain about his dreams and that had only angered the man further in Harry's opinion. At this time, Harry wished that he could be anywhere but there. Severus would not be merciful and Harry was afraid the potions master would forever hate him.

"Do you have any idea what you have done?" Severus said softly, eyes deadly.

Harry gulped. "It was my choice and I did what I had to. What I've done will give someone worthy a chance to right the wizarding world. It also gives me the chance to escape the war should I need to," Harry stated boldly.

"You have overlooked far too many things to make such a decision," Severus snarled. "You stupid boy. You could have been murdered or evicted for murder. Luck is all that saved you from your dimwitted, idiotic, thoughts."

Harry could only look down at his lap, ashamed.

"The death of the Weasley girl will haunt you," Severus said, eyes blazing. "The next time you wish to rush into these situations, remember that you are still only a child. There is much that you have not experienced and there is much you do not know about the wizards that control our world."

"Yes, sir." Harry bit his lip and chanced a look at Severus. "I won't apologize though because I don't regret what I did even now."

"Good." Harry's head snapped up and looked at Severus, incredulity all over his face.

"It is good that you do not regret your actions. Regret does not serve humans in the purpose of correcting their wrongs nor does it aid them in fulfilling their desires." Severus sat down next to Harry and pulled the boy into a one-armed hug.

Harry smiled slightly. Severus wasn't going to ignore him after all. Perhaps the man would get over his anger much faster than anticipated and perhaps his punishment wouldn't be too severe.

"I have a crucial matter to discuss with you." Severus looked down at Harry, eyes narrowed slightly. "You will stay with me this summer as there is no other place you may go. Charlie Weasley cannot accept your presence as their dragon eggs have begun hatching. I wish for you to think on a proposal I have for you, and I urge you to think carefully before you give me an answer," Severus warned.

Harry nodded and looked at him curiously.

Severus pulled out a few folded pieces of parchment and presented them to Harry. The words on the parchment blurred in front of Harry's eyes and he stared wide-eyed at the sheets. Had he read right?

"It would be my honour to adopt you as a Snape, Harry."

"Are you...sure?" Harry whispered. "I can't accept this."

"I have grown rather fond of you," Severus said, mirth lacing his tone. "You would be most welcomed in not only my home, but my family and heart as well."

Harry wiped at a tear that fell. "Will you yell at me for not thinking carefully if I say yes now?"

Severus only smiled. Harry threw his arms around the man and held him tightly, not caring to wipe his watery eyes.

"I need to know something, though," Harry whispered.

Severus frowned lightly. "You have told me of the Dark Lord and you wish to know whether I am on the Light side or the Dark side?"

"I need to know, Severus," Harry said pleadingly. "I won't think of you any less and if my reaction isn't pleasing, then feel free to obliviate me. I just...I just figured that even if you were on Dumbledore's side, you wouldn't tell him about Voldemort. You would have to tell

Dumbledore about me as well then, and I...I may have put too much trust in you, but I don't think you would do that."

Harry, who had yet to let go of Severus, buried his face further into Severus' robes.

"Lucius and I have served the Dark Lord for a long time. Lucius has been contacted by him recently, and has relayed some information to me. Much of the information however is classified so not even I know what the Dark Lord has in plan for us. At the moment, we are under the assumption of being spies for Dumbledore." Severus frowned. "Never tell another what you have told me, unless approved by the Dark Lord. You put too many at risk by asking me such a question after revealing the truth."

"I'm sorry," Harry muttered. "I just already thought you were against Dumbledore."

Severus simply shook his head, allowing Harry to cling to him. The boy was strangely affectionate at the moment but Severus suspected that the previous events had drained him emotionally. He wrapped gentle arms around the boy and could not help but smile when Harry snuggled into his embrace even further.

"We will get in contact with the Dark Lord over the summer and speak further on that matter once we have arrived at my home." Severus looked down to see if Harry was listening but the boy had fallen asleep.

A small chuckle left Severus' lips as he carefully took the boy to his bedroom and tucked him in. There would be plenty of time to talk later. The last few days of school could be used for relaxation, the poor boy would need his friends more than anything at the moment. Severus would have to advise Harry from telling the other boys what had happened when he woke up, but for now, Harry could sleep peacefully.

Harry entered the infirmary slowly, noticing that Blaise and Draco were already there and talking to a tired looking but awake Theodore. Harry smiled and came up beside them. Blaise raised a brow but did not say anything. Draco narrowed his eyes, furious.

"Welcome back, Theo," Harry greeted warmly, ignoring Draco for the moment.

"It's good to be back." Theo shifted and yawned. "Sorry, I'm not much of a conversationalist at the moment."

"That's all right, we'll come back later," Blaise said quickly, ushering Draco and Harry towards the door.

Harry ducked his head as a smile blossomed on his face. He wondered if Blaise liked Theodore more than as a friend. The sound of a throat clearing caught his attention.

Blaise looked at Draco then Harry. "Clear up whatever's got your panties in a twist before you come back to the common room."

Draco scowled at the boy but looked at Harry seriously.

"You're a right bastard," Draco said calmly.

"I know," Harry replied softly. He looked down at his shoes, feeling overwhelming sad.

Draco sighed and reached forward, gently tugging at Harry's earlobe. Harry looked up at Draco and was met with an annoyed smile.

"We'll talk later," Draco said quickly, slugging Harry's arm playfully.

Harry grinned and quickly embraced him.

Draco did his best not to grin when he saw Slytherin colours decorating the hall. Gryffindor had lost more points than ever during the last month or two of the term. They had been chaotic about the

attacks and while their actions were signs of loyalty, their behaviour was so out of control that even more lenient teachers had taken points from them.

The lack of completed homework was the main cause, Draco suspected. He did not understand how they could neglect something as important as their studies. Did they have no ambitions for the future? Did they want to be stuck doing some pathetic job they would hate for the rest of their life? Draco huffed. Perhaps there were things more important than school, but everyone else had dealt with the attacks much more reasonably.

He would never admit how much he actually admired the loyalty in Gryffindor house. There were the occasional bad apples but there were some people who would make fantastic allies. Too bad they would never cooperate with a Slytherin, Draco mused, looking away from the Gryffindor table.

A small smile broke out on his face when he saw that Harry was smiling at him. "Congratulations to us on the house cup and the Quidditch cup," Harry said joyously.

Draco smirked. "Naturally we won. There was nothing that Dumbledore could award Gryffindor for falsely this year."

Harry's face darkened momentarily but Draco didn't call him on it, receiving another smile.

"Let's enjoy ourselves, shall we?" Draco sidled closer to Harry and grinned conspiratorially. "We can welcome Theo back with a nice prank on Blaise. That prat's been driving me crazy all year, almost as bad as the Gryffs!"

Harry chuckled and smirked mischievously. "What do you have in mind?"

Draco tugged Harry's earlobe. "Listen closely."

As Draco began talking, the doors burst open to reveal a flustered looking Hagrid. The groundskeeper entered and sent an unusual look at Harry before making his way to the head table with a smile. The

idea of pranking Blaise was lost on Draco as he was pulled into a conversation about Quidditch.

“Welcome back, Hagrid,” Dumbledore said kindly.

“It’s good teh be back,” Hagrid mumbled, sitting down heavily.

“You will be at Severus’ manor all summer, right?” Draco asked, leaning against a bedpost and pinning Harry with a raised eyebrow.

“I will definitely be there, because...” Harry paused and smiled in uncontained happiness. “Sev said he wants to adopt me.”

Draco looked surprised and delighted as he bounded over to Harry and slung his arm over the boy’s shoulders. “Guess you won’t ever be able to escape me now. Father and Sev are best friends after all. Like father, like son.” Draco winked.

Harry laughed and wrapped his arm around Draco’s waist. “That sounds rather nice, actually. I hope we’re friends forever, Dray.”

“As do I,” Draco said solemnly. “It’s going to be tough though, but I think we can get through it.”

Harry frowned and nodded. He perked up almost immediately though. “Let’s get some sleep. Tomorrow’s going to be an interesting day.”

Draco fell back, landing both of them on the bed. They laughed and curled up under the blankets. It did not take long for them to fall asleep despite the many thoughts running through their heads.

“I’ll see you,” Harry said to his friends, waving them off onto the train.

He remained behind, having other means of transportation to Severus' manor. Once the train was nearly out of sight, Severus came striding towards Harry.

"We will be taking a portkey to my home. I must explain something to you when we get there and you will understand why once you see my home," Severus said, tonelessly.

Harry nodded and allowed Severus to pick up his trunk then pull out a portkey. He placed his hand on the sheet of parchment and looked up at his new guardian with a soft smile.

"Soon you will be part of a family," Severus said mildly, eyes watching carefully for a reaction.

"Will I get to call you father?" Harry asked cheekily.

Severus looked at him. "Hopefully."

The portkey went into action and they disappeared from the platform, leaving no trace other than sudden warmth behind.

THE END!
